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Ellen F. Jackofsky
Southern Methodist University

Lawrence H. Peters
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

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JOB TURNOVER VERSUS COMPANY TURNOVER: REASSESSMENT OF
THE MARCH AND SIMON PARTICIPATION MODEL

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by

Ellen F. Jackofsky

and

Lawrence H. Peters

Ellen F. Jackofsky
Assistant Professor
Organizational Behavior and Administration
Edwin L. Cox School of Business
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas 75275

Lawrence H. Peters
Department of Administrative Sciences
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale
Carbondale, Illinois 62901

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Abstract

This study is designed to test the proposition that both intra-organizational and inter-organizational mobility, as opposed to inter-organizational mobility alone, may be a more appropriate criterion for testing conceptual propositions regarding the prediction of turnover. To this end, the March and Simon (1958) participation model was tested utilizing two different dependent measures, job turnover and organizational turnover, among a sample of 290 retail sales employees. Measures of job satisfaction and the expectation of finding alternatives were administered and eight months later turnover data were collected. Using moderated regression, it was found that with the criterion, job turnover, the ease x desirability hypothesis was better supported than with the criterion, organizational turnover. Implications for theory and research on employee turnover are discussed.

Job Turnover Versus Company Turnover: Reassessment
of the March and Simon Participation Model

In research on turnover, the criterion is typically assessed in terms of whether or not a given subject has remained with his/her employing organization at the time the criterion measure is assessed. Persons who have voluntarily left their employing organization are classified as leavers, whereas those who continue their employment with their original organization are classified as stayers. The purpose of the present paper is to argue for a different conceptualization of the turnover criterion and present data relevant to it. In particular, we are suggesting that both intra-organizational and inter-organizational mobility, as opposed to inter-organizational mobility alone, more closely approximates an appropriate conceptualization of the turnover criterion, and, therefore, provides a more desirable criterion for testing conceptual propositions regarding the prediction of turnover.

Based on this notion of job turnover, as opposed to organizational turnover, persons who leave their current jobs, whether or not they leave their employing organizations, would be classified as leavers and only those who remain on the same job would be classified as stayers. Persons who are dissatisfied with their current positions or who desire to increase work-related valued outcomes through transfer or promotion might, therefore, accomplish either objective by changing jobs without simultaneously changing organizations.

The question of mobility within an organization as an alternative to leaving the organization has only recently received attention. Todor (Note 1), for example, found that individuals who had requested, but not received, an internal job transfer within the previous year had a greater intention to

leave the organization, were less satisfied with their jobs, and were less loyal to their company than those who had changed jobs in the previous year or who had not requested a transfer at all. Based on these results, Todor (Note 1) concluded that (a) the antecedents of turnover and internal job transfer are strikingly similar and (b) intra-organizational movement appears to be as effective a withdrawal mechanism as leaving the organization for individuals who are dissatisfied with their jobs. In a similar vein, Alfred (1967) suggested that individuals who choose to look for an alternative to their current job will look first within their current organization, and only later look to alternatives outside of their current organization.

These data and arguments suggest that intra-organizational movement should be more carefully considered in the prediction of turnover. The present paper provides such an opportunity. To the extent that turnover is more meaningfully conceptualized as movement away from one's current job, whether or not actual movement across organizational boundaries occurs, then empirical evidence testing conceptual propositions based on theory within the turnover area should provide more supportive results.

To this end, the basic March and Simon (1958) Participation Model was tested. This theoretical model was chosen since (a) it serves as the basis for many current theoretical models which specify various psychological processes said to underlie persons' turnover decisions (e.g., Jackofsky, 1982; Mobley, 1977; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand & Meglino, 1979; Price, 1977; Steers & Mowday, 1981), and (b) it is a model for which conflicting results have been reported (see Dansereau, Cashman & Graen, 1974; Fossum, Keaveny, & Jackson, Note 2; Price, 1977; Schwab & Dyer, Note 3; Woodward, 1975; 1976).

According to March and Simon (1958), persons' voluntary choices to leave an organization depend upon (a) their perceived "desirability" of movement and (b) their perceived "ease" of movement. In particular, March and Simon (1958) suggested an interaction of these two key variables such that actual choices to leave one's organization will depend upon both wanting to leave and being able to leave. By defining the turnover criterion to include both intra- and inter-organizational movement components, this basic turnover model becomes restructured to reflect job turnover as opposed to organizational turnover.¹

The present research was designed to test the March and Simon (1958) model and to compare the job turnover and organizational turnover conceptualizations of the turnover criterion. Based on the March and Simon (1958) model, one can hypothesize that ease of movement and desirability of movement would interact such that the relationship between turnover and desirability of movement would be significantly more negative among persons who perceived more, as opposed to less, ease of movement. In particular, it is hypothesized that results pertinent to this theoretically derived interaction hypothesis would be more supportive of the March and Simon (1958) Participation Model for the measure of job turnover than for the measure of organizational turnover.

Method

Sample and Procedures

The sample was composed of 290 sales employees of a large department store chain who worked at one of 12 locations in the same large urban area in the Southwest. The majority of the participants sold clothing and clothing accessories. All were paid on an hourly basis and worked full-time.

The sample was composed of 26 males and 264 females. The average age of these employees was 31.7 years, and 105 of them were married. All participation was voluntary and anonymity was guaranteed.

The first author met with groups of employees at each of the 12 store locations during normal working hours in order to administer the research questionnaire. Initial data collection took place over a three month period, from August, 1980 through October, 1980. Eight months after each employee had completed the questionnaire, information concerning turnover was collected directly from the local personnel offices at each of the 12 store locations.

Measures

Job Satisfaction. Typically, desirability of movement is measured in terms of differing levels of job satisfaction (Mobley, 1982). To this end, both the Job Satisfaction Index (JSI, Brayfield & Rothe, 1951) and Job Descriptive Index (JDI, Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969) were employed. The JSI provides a measure of overall job satisfaction whereas the JDI assesses satisfaction with regard to the specific job facets of Work, Supervision, Co-Workers, Advancement Opportunities and Pay. Reliability estimates, based on Cronbach's alpha, for these scales ranged from .71 to .88.

Expectation of Finding Alternatives. Three items were written to assess the extent to which persons believed that they were able to find acceptable work elsewhere, either within or outside of their current company. Persons responded to each item on a 5-point Likert scale. Responses were summed to create a total score, where the greater the score, the greater the perceived ease of movement. The reliability for this scale was .64.

Turnover. The criterion data were collected to reflect whether the subjects (a) were on the same job eight months after the questionnaire data were

collected, (b) had voluntarily changed jobs within the current organization, (c) had voluntarily left the organization, or (d) had left the organization on a non-voluntary basis. Based on these data, two types of turnover were investigated: (a) voluntary job turnover to include those who left their job plus those who left the organization and (b) voluntary organizational turnover to include only those who had actually left the organization.

Out of the 290 employees who completed the original questionnaire, 25 had left the company on a non-voluntary basis or had gone on leave of absence. As a result, these individuals were excluded from further analyses. Of the remaining employees, 124 were still on their same jobs, 42 had changed jobs within the company, and 99 had changed companies. Thus, there were 124 stayers and 141 leavers (the 42 who changed jobs within the same company plus the 99 who changed companies) in all analyses involving the job turnover conceptualization. When organizational turnover was tested, 166 stayers (the 124 on the same job plus the 42 who changed jobs but not companies) were compared to 99 leavers.

Results

The March and Simon (1958) ease x desirability interaction hypothesis was tested, in separate analyses, for each of the six measures of satisfaction, and for both the job turnover and organizational turnover measures. Moderated regression procedures were utilized to test for the hypothesized interaction effect (see Cohen, 1978). These results are shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

With regard to the job turnover criterion, the hypothesized ease x desirability interaction was significant in five of the six cases. Using the organizational turnover criterion, only one of the six analyses produced a significant interaction term.

The significant interactions were plotted and found to conform to the basic March and Simon model. The relationship between satisfaction and turnover was found to be negative among persons with greater perceived ease of movement. Another way of depicting these results is to note that differences in dissatisfaction are associated with turnover only among those who perceive a greater ease of movement. An example of the results depicting a significant ease x desirability interaction is shown in Figure 1. The other significant interactions were similar in nature.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Discussion

The data from the current investigation support a conceptualization of the turnover criterion which includes both intra-organizational and inter-organizational movement. This job turnover criterion was found to produce results more consistent with theoretical propositions regarding the prediction of turnover. As such, these data suggest the usefulness of a job turnover conceptualization of turnover.

It is reasonable to believe that intra- and inter-organizational movement are similar with regard to their impact on individuals. From an individual's perspective, changing jobs, whether or not a change of organizations also occurs, may mean moving from a dissatisfying or boring job situation to a more satisfying or interesting one. A job change, like an organizational change,

may also result in changes in other facets of work, to include supervision, co-workers, advancement opportunities, and in some case, even pay. In this sense, job turnover is the more general form of withdrawal, and organizational turnover is a particular manifestation of it. While similarities clearly do exist, they nonetheless represent conceptually distinct criteria which, based on the present data, cannot be ignored in theoretical models designed to explain determinants of turnover.

The present findings highlight Muchinsky's (1978) point that future efforts within the turnover area need to be aimed at an appropriate refinement of the turnover criterion itself. As a consequence of the current attempt to refine the turnover criterion, the present results not only support the dominant theoretical position regarding the determinants of turnover, but in addition, (a) suggest an explanation for the inconsistent previous results regarding the ease x desirability interaction, and more generally, (b) suggest the appropriate strategy for use in future empirical research aimed at explaining variance in turnover.

In this regard, it is important to note that the criterion can be constructed to reflect either a job-specific (movement away from one's present job) or organization-specific (movement away from one's present organization) behavior. While desirability of movement has been consistently operationalized as a job-specific phenomenon (i.e., job satisfaction), the assessment of ease of movement has tended to reflect both job- and organization-specific phenomena in previous literature. For example, Price and Bluedorn (1979) have assessed this variable in terms of whether or not alternatives could be found with another employer while Schwab and Dyer (1974) have assessed it simply in terms of alternative job opportunities. In the first case, ease of movement

reflects persons' beliefs regarding inter-organizational movement. In contrast, the second operationalization reflects persons' beliefs concerning movement to other jobs which can be found either within or outside of their current organization. Thus, desirability of movement has most typically reflected a job-specific variable, while ease of movement has been variously assessed to measure either a job-specific or organization-specific variable.²

Given that the turnover criterion has typically been constructed to reflect an organization-specific behavior (i.e., organizational turnover), it is not surprising that inconsistent results have been found. There should be little reasons to expect desirability of movement, measured at a job-specific level, and ease of movement, variously measured at a job-specific or organization-specific level, to consistently predict an organization-specific behavior. Thus, it should not be surprising to find inconsistent findings within the previous literature on the ease x desirability interaction.

More generally, it would seem most appropriate to either predict job turnover from job-specific variables and organizational turnover from organization-specific variables. In this regard, Smith's (1976) remark regarding the need to "match" predictors and criteria with regard to their level of specificity is highly relevant. The present data clearly suggest the appropriateness of this strategy within future research in the turnover area.

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Footnotes

¹It should be noted that March and Simon (1958) did consider perceived intra-organizational movement as a precursor to person's perceived desirability of movement. To date, however, no empirical research has been published which reports on relationships between intra-organizational turnover and either the desirability or ease of movement.

²The present data suggest that the use of job satisfaction and an ease of movement measure which reflects both intra- and inter-organizational movement are most appropriate for predicting job turnover. We can only speculate on conceptually appropriate variables for predicting organizational turnover. Clearly, ease of movement measures must be aimed at assessing persons' beliefs concerning the availability of alternatives in the relevant labor market outside of their current organization. It would appear that the construct of "organizational commitment" might be a conceptually appropriate proxy of desirability of movement for predicting organizational turnover criteria. Not only has this variable been shown to consistently predict turnover, but, in addition, it has been shown to be more closely related to turnover than job satisfaction (see, for example, Hom, Katerberg, & Hulin, 1979; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). In addition, research by Peters, Bhagat, & O'Connor (1981) has shown that commitment and job satisfaction add non-redundant sources of variance to the prediction of persons' intentions to quit. It would seem that future empirical efforts might profitably be directed toward elaborating and testing conceptually appropriate notions regarding the prediction of organizational turnover.

Table 1
Results of the Moderated Regression of the
Interaction of Ease and Desirability of Movement in the Prediction
of Job Turnover and Organizational Turnover

Independent Variables	Job Turnover			Organizational Turnover		
	R ²	F _{step}	df	R ²	F _{step}	df
1. JSI	.008	2.11	1,257	.011	3.10	1,257
2. Expectations	.016	2.01	1,256	.026	3.84*	1,256
3. JSI x Expectations	.036	5.34*	1,255	.036	2.60	1,255
1. JDIWOR	.014	3.80*	1,259	.017	4.39*	1,259
2. Expectations	.019	1.30	1,258	.028	2.97	1,258
3. JDIWOR x Expectations	.054	9.39**	1,257	.037	2.40	1,257
1. JDIPAY	.015	4.08*	1,259	.019	4.94*	1,259
2. Expectations	.006	1.55	1,258	.031	3.33	1,258
3. JDIPAY x Expectations	.004	1.06	1,257	.039	2.11	1,257
1. JDIPRO	.000	.07	1,259	.017	4.46*	1,259
2. Expectations	.010	2.59	1,258	.018	3.25	1,258
3. JDIPRO x Expectations	.037	7.20**	1,257	.036	4.75*	1,257
1. JDISUP	.002	.58	1,256	.000	.03	1,256
2. Expectations	.010	1.94	1,255	.015	3.92*	1,255
3. JDISUP x Expectations	.027	4.57*	1,254	.023	2.08	1,254
1. JDICOW	.001	.15	1,258	.001	.27	1,258
2. Expectations	.009	2.31	1,257	.018	4.42*	1,257
3. JDICOW x Expectations	.026	6.88**	1,256	.026	2.23	1,256

Note. Expectations=Expectations of Finding Alternatives; JSI=Overall Job Satisfaction; JDIWOR=Satisfaction with Work; JDIPAY=Satisfaction with Pay; JDIPRO=Satisfaction with Promotions; JDISUP=Satisfaction with Supervision; JDICOW=Satisfaction with Co-workers.

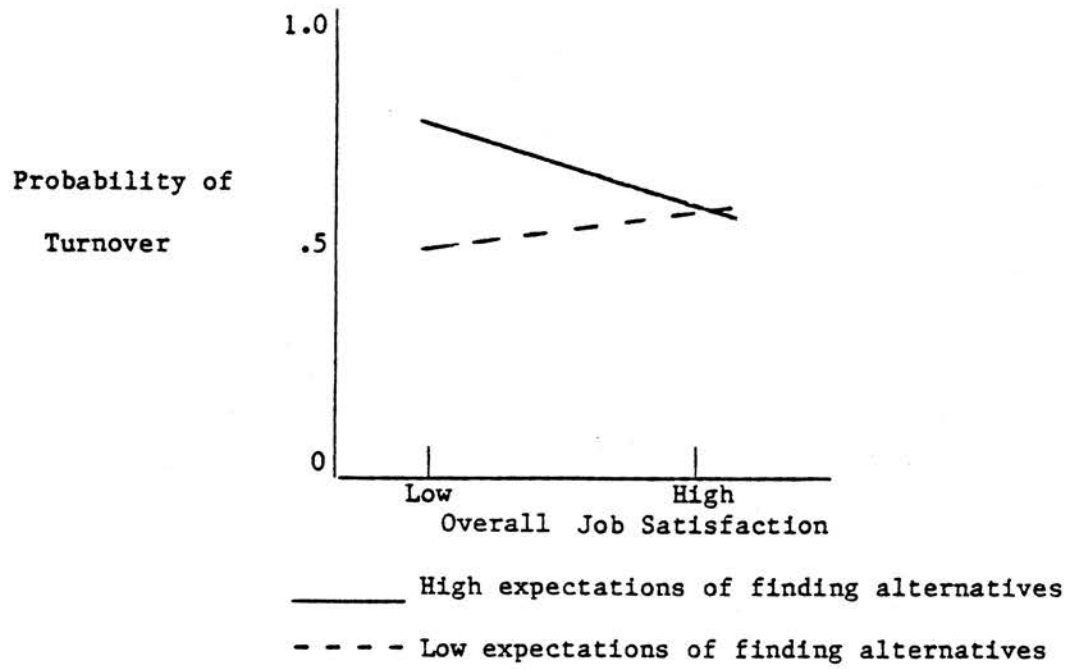
*p<.05

**p<.01

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Interaction effects of job satisfaction and the expectation of finding alternatives on the probability of turnover

Job Turnover



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