

MANAGEMENT TURNOVER: EXPERIENTIAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FORMER AND CURRENT MANAGERS

MICHAEL A. CAMPION, MICHELLE M. MITCHELL
IBM Corporation

Potential experiential determinants of managerial turnover were investigated based on questionnaire responses from 140 former managers and 143 current managers within the same organization. To assess these experiences, measures were developed from four different areas of literature that consider the turnover phenomenon. Results indicate that, compared to current managers, former managers describe their managerial experiences in terms of (1) less satisfying job characteristics, (2) greater degrees of adjustment and socialization difficulties, (3) more unmet job expectations, and (4) greater degrees of job stress. Furthermore, it was discovered that all four areas of literature actually give very similar advice on reducing turnover, but each area differs in terms of intended applications and time perspective. Recommendations are provided for reducing management turnover.

The first well publicized review of turnover in the psychological literature was conducted by Brayfield and Crockett in 1955. Since that time, there have been at least five reviews: Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson, and Capwell (1957); Vroom (1964); Schuh (1967); Porter and Steers (1973); and Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, and Meglino (1979). Almost without exception, the studies reviewed address turnover that involved leaving the organization. Further, most of this research has been on turnover among nonmanagement personnel.

A different type of turnover involves leaving one job for another

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within the same organization. This situation affords two unique opportunities for the study of turnover. First, the turnover does not necessarily reflect a dissatisfaction with the company or its general policies, but rather with aspects of the particular job itself. Thus, job turnover may be separated from job *and* company turnover. The second advantage is that the employees are still available and usually willing to provide information as to why they left a particular job.

This study explores the turnover of management personnel: why some people leave management for nonmanagement jobs in the same organization. The focus is on management because management turnover may be most dysfunctional for the organization.

Pilot work in the present organization indicated that virtually all of this turnover represented voluntary, lateral moves to nonmanagement positions. Furthermore, there were no differences between those who left management and those who remained on a broad spectrum of demographic variables, from race and sex to education and tenure. There were also no differences in rated job performance, indicating that the turnover was not in response to failure. All this suggested that the turnover may be precipitated in part by unpleasant experiences in management. It is the thesis of this study that those who left management had different experiences than those who remained in management. Knowledge of these differences may have implications for management development and practice.

At least four areas of literature bear on differences in job experiences that might lead to turnover. One deals with those characteristics that make jobs satisfying and motivating. Stemming from early work on job enrichment and enlargement (Ford, 1969; Herzberg, 1966, 1968), a sizable body of research has demonstrated the influence of certain job characteristics on satisfaction and absenteeism (e.g., Campion & Thayer, 1985; Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Pierce & Dunham, 1976; Turner & Lawrence, 1965). These characteristics include such job dimensions as autonomy, feedback, variety, and achievement. Jobs low on these features lead to low satisfaction, low motivation, low job involvement, absenteeism, and possibly even to voluntary turnover.

A second relevant area of literature is that of career development. The transition into a new job or occupation requires a period of adjustment or socialization (Schein, 1978). During socialization the person learns how to work in the new job, finds a place in the social structure, and develops a perspective on the organization. Some of the specific tasks of the socialization stage include dealing with the boss, figuring out the reward system, coping with resistance to change, and

developing a social niche. Improper or incomplete socialization into management could result in turnover.

Third, the literature on met expectations is also relevant. Most people approach a new job or occupation with a set of expectations for a broad variety of job attributes such as the nature of the work, the supervision, and the likely outcomes. When these expectations are not met, dissatisfaction and turnover may result (Dunnette, Arvey, & Banas, 1973; Wanous, 1973, 1980). Perhaps unmet expectations for the management job encourage some people to return to nonmanagement positions.

A fourth area relevant to turnover is the literature on occupational stress. The negative impact of stress at work on mental and physical health is well recognized (Beehr & Newman, 1978). Many of the frequently discussed work stressors (e.g., work overload, role conflict) may be particularly common in management positions (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1980). As noted by Newman and Beehr (1979), withdrawal behavior, like changing jobs, is a personal strategy for handling job stress.

This study compares the management experiences of former managers with current managers. It is hypothesized that, compared to current managers, former managers will report (1) lower levels of satisfying characteristics in their management jobs, (2) a greater degree of difficulty adjusting to management, (3) more unmet expectations in management, and (4) a greater degree of occupational stress in management.

The study compares reported experiences of former and current managers in a postdictive design, and any post hoc data collection method may be susceptible to distortions in memory. However, because the measures are designed to elicit specific and noteworthy aspects of previous management experiences, we believe that this potential threat to validity will be minimized.

Method

Sample

A power analysis (Cohen, 1977) indicated that a sample of at least 120 would be needed to detect a moderate ($d = .40$) effect size between means with maximum power (99%). Data were collected from 140 former managers and a random sample of 143 current managers at a large southern location of an electronics firm. All former managers had left management within the previous 3.5 years.

TABLE 1

Demographic Characteristics of Former and Current Managers

Variable	Former managers (<i>n</i> = 140)		Current managers (<i>n</i> = 143)		<i>t</i> ^a
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Company tenure ^b	18.15	6.12	17.95	7.14	.25
Tenure before management ^b	10.96	5.14	11.65	5.36	-1.11
Tenure in management ^b	7.19	5.17	6.30	5.63	1.38
Appraisal rating ^c	2.42	.84	2.56	1.56	-1.13
Education ^d	4.54	1.60	4.43	1.48	.58

^aAll *t* tests nonsignificant at $p < .05$.

^bYears of tenure.

^cMost recent management appraisal rating. 4-point scale, with 1 being highest.

^d8-point scale, with 8 being highest.

It should be noted that the management turnover rate was approximately 8% per year. With relatively few exceptions, none of this turnover involved leaving the company, but instead it involved leaving management for a nonmanagement position in the same organization. This degree of movement out of management may be greater than that observed in other companies due to the existence of a dual career ladder (i.e., both management and nonmanagement career hierarchies are available).

A comparison of the demographic characteristics of the samples showed no significant differences between former and current managers in terms of age, sex, or racial composition, or in terms of other typical demographic measures such as those in Table 1. It is noteworthy that no differences were observed in appraisal ratings, either in terms of the most recent management appraisal rating (as shown in Table 1) or in terms of the two previous to the most recent (not shown). This indicates the turnover was not a case of self-selection out of management due to low performance.

In addition, no differences were observed between former and current managers in areas of the organization managed. In both samples approximately 63% came from manufacturing and 37% came from development areas of the organization, and these percentages roughly reflect the relative sizes of the areas at the time of the study. This later finding is important in that development jobs are typically more technical than manufacturing jobs, and thus they might be expected to have greater percentages of people leaving management because of

the greater availability of high-level nonmanagement technical jobs.

Measures

A questionnaire was developed to assess job experiences in terms of the four reasons for turnover described above.

Satisfying job characteristics. A modified version of a job design scale based on Campion and Thayer (1985) was used to measure potentially satisfying and motivating features of jobs. The original measure was developed from an extensive review of the job design recommendations in the organizational psychology literature. Respondents were asked to describe their experiences as a manager by rating their satisfaction with each of 19 job attributes on a 5-point scale ranging from "1—very satisfied" to "5—very dissatisfied." Examples of attributes include autonomy, variety, goal clarity, participation, and feedback.

Job adjustment. Based largely on Schein's (1978) description of the tasks of socialization, 14 statements were written which described indicators of either good or poor adjustment to management. Examples include, "You were included in the informal social network in your work area," and "Your manager gave you too little information on what you were to do and what was expected of you." Respondents rated how descriptive each statement was of their experience as a manager using a 5-point scale ranging from "1—a very great extent" to "5—no extent," with anchors from Bass, Cascio, and O'Connor (1974).

Met expectations. Borrowing from measures used by Dunnette, et al. (1973), participants were asked whether their management job(s) met their expectations on 14 job dimensions: for example, "to have high status and prestige" and "to have influence on the organization." Evaluations were made on a 3-point scale ranging from "1—fully met expectations" to "3—did not meet expectations."

Job stress. Participants were asked how often each of 23 stressors was found to be an obstacle in management. Examples, derived mostly from Ivancevich and Matteson (1980), include, "Your job duties and objectives were unclear," and "You had more work to do than could be done in an ordinary day." Ratings were made on a 5-point scale for frequency ranging from "1—always" to "5—never" as suggested by Bass, et al. (1974).

Each of the summated scales had an internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951) of at least .86 and no nonpositive item-total correlations.

TABLE 2

Means and Standard Deviations on the Job Experience Scales

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Satisfying job characteristics ^a	2.54	.56
Job adjustment ^a	2.65	.56
Met expectations ^b	1.85	.42
Job stress ^c	3.32	.49

Note. *N* = 283.

^a5-point scale, with 1 being most positive.

^b3-point scale, with 1 being most positive.

^c5-point scale, with 5 being most positive.

Finally, former managers were asked whether their job level increased, decreased, or stayed the same when they left management; and they were also asked to rate the degree to which they would like to return to management on a 5-point scale ranging from "1—definitely yes" to "5—definitely no." In addition, former managers were asked to describe the most important reason or reasons they left management in a write-in comments section of the questionnaire.

Procedure. The same questionnaire was used for both former and current managers, with a note on the cover of those sent to current managers explaining that the questions were worded in the past tense so that their responses could be compared to those of former managers. Both groups were instructed that, if they had more than one management job, they should describe their overall management experience in general when answering the questions. Questionnaires were sent to all 174 former managers who had left management in the previous 3.5 years. Questionnaires were also sent to a random sample of 174 current managers. The return rates were 80% and 82%, respectively. A cover memorandum explained the purpose of the study, assured anonymity and voluntary participation, and specified a date for questionnaire return. A follow-up memorandum was used to enhance the response rate.

Results

Table 2 contains the means and standard deviations on the job experience scales. No skew or range restriction is apparent. Table 3 shows that the job experience scales are highly intercorrelated. Table 3 also shows that the most recent management appraisal rating was not correlated with any of the job experience scales.

To provide an overall multivariate test of the hypothesis that the

TABLE 3

Intercorrelations Among the Job Experience Scales and Appraisal Rating

	Satisfying job characteristics	Job adjustment	Met expectations	Job stress
Job adjustment	.72			
Met expectations	.79	.66		
Job stress	-.66	-.72	-.58	
Appraisal rating	.10	.10	-.02	-.06

Note. $N = 283$. All correlations with job experience scales significant beyond $p < .05$. All correlations with appraisal rating nonsignificant.

TABLE 4

Differences between Former and Current Managers on the Job Experience Scales in the Total Sample

Scale	Former managers ($n = 140$)		Current managers ($n = 143$)		t	Correlation with group variable	Correlation with canonical variate
	M	SD	M	SD			
Satisfying job characteristics	2.69	.57	2.40	.51	4.39	.25	.93
Job adjustment	2.79	.57	2.51	.50	4.31	.25	.91
Met expectations	1.94	.43	1.75	.39	3.99	.23	.85
Job stress	3.22	.50	3.42	.46	-3.48	-.20	-.76

Note. All t tests and correlations significant beyond $p < .05$.

job experience scales differ between the two sets of managers, a discriminant analysis was conducted. The resulting discriminant function is highly significant ($F = 5.66$, $df = 4,276$, $p < .001$), and it correctly classifies 61% of the former and current managers. Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations on the experience scales for both groups, and the univariate t tests between them. Significant differences exist on all scales in predicted directions.

Univariate correlations with the group variable are also contained in Table 4 to give an understanding of the size of the relationships. All of these correlations are of a similar, moderate size. The canonical correlation between the four scales and group membership is .28. The correlations between the scales and the canonical variate in the far right column of Table 4 can be interpreted like factor loadings (Cooley & Lohnes, 1971; Darlington, Weinberg, & Walberg, 1973). They indicate that all the scales help explain the difference between the two groups of managers. Lastly, a redundancy analysis (Cooley & Lohnes,

TABLE 5

Differences between Former and Current Managers on the Job Experience Scales in the Reduced Sample

Scale	Former managers (<i>n</i> = 80)		Current managers (<i>n</i> = 143)		<i>t</i>	Correlation with group variable	Correlation with canonical variate
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Satisfying job characteristics	2.85	.52	2.40	.51	6.20	.38	.97
Job adjustment	2.91	.55	2.51	.50	5.52	.35	.87
Met expectations	2.02	.42	1.75	.39	4.84	.31	.78
Job stress	3.10	.58	3.42	.46	-4.81	-.31	-.78

Note. All *t* tests and correlations significant beyond $p < .05$.

1971; Stewart & Love, 1968) shows that the job experience scales can explain 8% of the variance in group membership.

The data were reanalyzed, excluding those whose job level increased when they left management (14.4%) and those who definitely intend to return to management (36.0%), because such situations reflect the most positive reasons for leaving management such as for promotion and temporary developmental assignments (combined total of 43.0%). Table 5 shows that the effect of this reanalysis was to increase the size of the mean differences between the two groups. The discriminant function can correctly classify 72% of this sample, and the canonical correlation is .40. The job experience scales can now explain 16% of the variance in group membership.

When those who left management for supposed "positive" reasons (e.g., promotions and developmental assignments) were compared with current managers, no statistically significant differences were found across the four job experience scales ($n = 60$, $p < .05$).

The 140 former managers produced 198 write-in comments describing reasons for leaving management. Two independent raters, who were unfamiliar with the hypotheses of the study, were provided with descriptions of the four categories of reasons for turnover and with the questionnaire items assessing the four categories. They were asked to classify each comment into one or more of the four categories or into an "other reasons" category.

Although the absolute percentages of agreement were quite high across categories (73% to 83%), the interrater reliabilities were moderate for job adjustment ($r = .43$, $p < .05$) and job stress ($r = .52$, $p < .05$), and low to nonexistent for satisfying job characteristics ($r = .29$, $p < .05$) and met expectations ($r = .05$, n.s.). However, the reliability of classifications to "other reasons" is higher ($r = .65$, $p <$

.05). These latter comments typically describe positive reasons for leaving management such as promotion or career development. On the average, 39.7% of the comments are assigned to this category, which agrees quite closely with the 43.0% of the former managers who indicated their job level increased when they left management or that they definitely intend to return to management.

Discussion

A broad spectrum of demographic variables could not explain voluntary, lateral movement out of management. Even job performance did not differ, indicating that the turnover was not precipitated by poor performance in management. Thus, experiential differences between former and current managers were explored. As predicted, compared to current managers, former managers described their management jobs as lower on satisfying and motivating features, they reported a greater degree of transition and adjustment problems to management, they had more unmet expectations in management, and they described a greater degree of job stress in management. The job experience scales can explain up to 16% of the variance in turnover in management, and they can correctly classify up to 72% of the sample.

This study extends the research on job characteristics in that those job features that have been shown to be associated with satisfaction, motivation, job involvement, and absenteeism (e.g., Campion & Thayer, 1985), can also be related to voluntary turnover. This could be expected because turnover, like absenteeism and low job involvement, may be a form of withdrawal. Establishing a relationship between these characteristics and turnover is useful because many are observable and subject to influence. Thus, job redesign may be a strategy to reduce turnover. For example, enhancing autonomy, responsibility, variety, skill usage, and so forth may make the job more psychologically meaningful and help prevent some turnover.

The importance of the adjustment or socialization process required by the transition into a new job has not received much empirical attention in the turnover literature. This study suggests that the more difficulty a new manager has, the greater the chances of turnover. Examination of the scales used in this study reveals that adjustment and socialization may be largely influenced by the immediate manager and the co-workers. That is, adjustment for a new manager may be primarily a function of establishing good working relationships with the next-level manager and other peer-level managers.

Met expectations can also be viewed as part of the transition or adjustment process. Their importance to turnover is reconfirmed here.

Perhaps realistic job previews should be incorporated into premanagement training or informal management grooming to help insure a match between expectations and attributes of management jobs.

Aside from its previously demonstrated relationships with numerous mental and physical health indices (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1980; Beehr & Newman, 1978), this study suggests that job stress can also be related to turnover. Turnover is a very effective, although perhaps unfortunate, strategy for handling such stress. On the other hand, many stressors, such as the ones examined in this study, are observable and possibly modifiable. Therefore, they suggest starting places for the reduction of management turnover.

A strength of this study is the integration of four loosely related areas of literature bearing on the common problem of turnover. An interesting, but unexpected, finding is the high set of intercorrelations among the job experience scales (see Table 3). They seem to covary as one common factor rather than as four separate entities.

Some of the intercorrelation among the job experience scales may be attributable to common method variance. All the measures were obtained at one time from the same questionnaire. However, this is unlikely to explain the magnitudes of the intercorrelations. Perhaps a better understanding can be gained from a rational examination of the questionnaire items, which reveal great similarity across the four scales. For example, many satisfying job characteristics (e.g., recognition, communication, and social interaction) are actually indicators of proper job adjustment. Likewise, many expectations one has for a job concern the degree of satisfying job characteristics and ease of job adjustment (e.g., expectation of having interesting work, having a good manager, being recognized for good work, and so on). Finally, most job stressors simply reflect too few satisfying job characteristics (e.g., no opportunities to grow and learn), poor job adjustment (e.g., manager not concerned about your welfare), and unmet expectations (e.g., good ideas got killed before receiving adequate attention).

This may also help explain the low interrater reliability in the classification of the write-in comments. Inspection of the comments illustrates that many of them tap reasons that are common to more than one of the categories, thus the raters may have had great difficulty in classifying the comments clearly into one category or another. For example, one former manager wrote, "I did not expect that the overtime hours would create such a strain on my nonwork activities." This comment reflects both unmet expectations and stress. In another comment, a former manager wrote that he left management because of a

"lack of coaching from my manager and no feelings of accomplishment from my job." This comment is clearly referring to both job adjustment (i.e., coaching) and satisfying job characteristics (i.e., accomplishment), but it could also be viewed as a job stressor or unmet expectation as well.

In essence, the considerable empirical and conceptual overlap among the four categories of reasons for turnover reflects the fact that they all represent the general advice from the organizational psychology literature as to how to make jobs satisfying and motivating. Each of the four areas of literature represents the application of largely the same advice to different situations. Whether one is designing jobs to optimize satisfaction, arranging smooth transitions into jobs, generating realistic expectations before job assignments, or reducing sources of job stress, many of the same psychological factors are important—e.g., interesting work, feedback on performance, sense of accomplishment, positive social environment, good communication, use of skills, opportunities for growth, and so on.

Taken in total, the four areas of literature offer practical recommendations for reducing turnover that cover a wide time perspective and a variety of situations. Prior to hiring or promotion into management, realistic expectations are a critical concern. Early in a management career, tasks of adjustment and socialization are important. Finally, in any ongoing management situation, many problems that arise may require understanding and addressing job stress, and increasing satisfying job features may be the key to enhanced vitality and motivation.

Although the four scales used in this study can classify 72% of the sample correctly as being from either the former or current group of managers, a significant proportion of the variance remains unexplained. Aside from measurement error, there may be many similarities between former and current managers that would minimize their response differences. Specifically, there may be current managers who have experienced the same adjustment problems, unmet expectations, stress, and dissatisfaction as former managers but have not left management for a variety of reasons. Examples include the status of management, obsolescence of technical skills, or greater opportunity for higher-level positions in the management hierarchy.

Postdictive designs, such as that used in this study, cannot separate out any distortions in memory that may occur after one leaves management. It may in fact be that former managers recall their previous management experiences in a less favorable light than what actually existed, especially if they left management under somewhat negative

circumstances. Even though the questionnaire items attempted to enhance memory accuracy by eliciting specific and noteworthy aspects of previous experience, the potential for this bias remains. Future research should examine managerial turnover from a longitudinal perspective where, for example, the experiences of large groups of managers are measured and then turnover is examined over time. Longitudinal research could also explore the effectiveness of various strategies, such as those mentioned above, for reducing turnover.

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