

## *Chapter 2*

# 25 YEARS OF VOLUNTARY TURNOVER RESEARCH: A REVIEW AND CRITIQUE

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Although there have been literally thousands of studies including voluntary turnover as a variable of interest, there has been a scarcity of comprehensive narrative reviews on the topic. Several well-known reviews exist, but they concentrate primarily on summarizing empirical bivariate relationships (e.g. Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand & Meglino, 1979) or developing voluntary turnover models (e.g. Bluedorn, 1982; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980; Price, 1977; Steers & Mowday, 1981). None of these reviews has attempted to cover all major areas of the individual turnover literature. The current chapter seeks to fill this gap, with the caveat that more space is generally devoted to studies not reviewed previously. A review of all major areas of voluntary turnover in one chapter allows researchers to have a broader perspective on the literature from which new interconnections and synergies can emerge. Also, this chapter should help clarify where incremental contributions can best be made and where relatively less research is needed.

The main organizing framework includes three sections: (a) Early Studies (1970s middle 1980s), (b) Recent Studies (middle 1980s through present), and (c) Conclusions and Future Research. For reviews of studies prior to the 1970s, see Porter and Steers (1973) and Schuh (1967). The temporal division between the 'Early Studies' and 'Recent Studies' sections is not arbitrary. Different issues and subtopics have emerged since the middle 1980s, suggesting two main phases in the research. In the first two sections, we address major issues in voluntary turnover that came to prominence during each phase. In the final section, we suggest general directions for future turnover research.

However, before beginning the main body, we attempt to better clarify the meaning of voluntary turnover. The definition of voluntary turnover has often been assumed to be straightforward and clear in much of the organizational psychology literature. Multiple perspectives do exist, however. Individual turnover decisions that are voluntary is the intended content domain of this review, but even this requires further specification.

### Defining Voluntary Turnover

The turnover criterion includes several different dimensions (Campion, 1991). The most obvious dimension of individual turnover, voluntariness, has typically been considered dichotomous (i.e. voluntary or involuntary). However, this dichotomization may fail to fully consider the complexity of reasons behind turnover decisions. For instance, some turnover reasons, such as quitting due to pregnancy, quitting due to the relocation of a spouse, or quitting to avoid expected involuntary termination, seem to have both voluntary and involuntary aspects. Ideally, research should accurately measure turnover voluntariness on a continuum.

However, there are many problems with turnover measurement (Campion, 1991). First, deficiencies exist in number and scope of turnover reasons typically collected in exit surveys and recorded in personnel files. Second, Campion (1991) pointed out that former employees and their supervisors may report multiple reasons for quitting. He found that agreement on all reasons among these two sources and personnel files was quite low (25%), even though agreement on at least one reason was higher (68%). This lack of agreement, along with the possibility of self-serving, retrospective biases affecting responses (e.g. Muchinsky & Tuttle, 1979), calls into question whether reasons can be reliably measured at all.

Lack of agreement also implies that voluntariness may depend on who you ask about the occurrence of turnover— employer or employee. Because most of the literature concerns psychological predictors and individual choice models, the employee perception would seem most important. However, different individuals can hold variant ideas on what constitutes a truly free-choice decision. Moreover, where surveying leavers is impossible, management's perspective on who initiated the termination may be the only information available to researchers.

Problems aside, future research must at minimum make explicit the criteria used for classifying cases as voluntary vs involuntary. In other words, researchers need to use relatively objective, verifiable criteria across studies. Toward this end, we define voluntary turnover here as: *instances wherein management agrees that the employee had the physical opportunity to continue employment with the company, at the time of termination.*

Voluntariness means that there was no impediment to continued employment from physical disability or from company management (i.e. employee

had not been advised of involuntary termination). For example, voluntary reasons would include non-mandatory retirement, quitting for family relocation, and quitting for a more secure job. All these reasons imply individual choice, even though the employee may feel as though the choice to stay is extremely costly. Future research should endeavor to collect multiple reasons for turnover from both employer and employee, to better ascertain voluntariness and to better approach a voluntariness continuum in the future.

### EARLY STUDIES

In early research there was a primary concern with the bivariate empirical correlates of voluntary turnover (Porter & Steers, 1973). In the 1970s, multivariate models of turnover antecedents and processes began to emerge, largely constructed from successful bivariate predictors. Multivariate models later came to dominate the literature in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But before discussing models which lead into more recent developments, we review literature on organizational consequences, avoidability, and control of voluntary turnover.

### Organizational Consequences

The negative consequences of voluntary turnover to the organization have been noted by researchers and practitioners alike. Probably the most obvious negative consequences of turnover are the added staffing and training costs associated with personnel loss (e.g. Mirvis & Lawler, 1977). Administrative costs usually increase with more cases of turnover (Dalton & Todor, 1982). Operational disruption may also occur (Staw, 1980), leading to lost capacity, production, and profits, especially in organizations where turnover rates are high or unpredictable. For instance, an employee with key skills and experience can be particularly costly for the organization to lose. Excessive voluntary turnover may also result in other intangible costs (e.g. low morale).

In contrast, some feel that negative effects have been overemphasized (Dalton, Todor & Krackhardt, 1982). A certain amount of voluntary turnover may even be positive for the organization, the economy, the society, and the individual employee (Dalton & Todor, 1979). The economy and society derive benefit from turnover because it generally permits job movement. A benefit accrues particularly when turnover occurs in the primary labor market, allowing entrance to those in secondary labor markets (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980). To the extent that voluntary turnover contributes to this sort of movement or improves person-job match, it can benefit society.

Dalton and his colleagues (e.g. Dalton & Todor, 1979; Dalton, Todor & Krackhardt, 1982) contend that there may be cases of functional turnover

which bring financial and other benefits to the organization. For example, an organization saves in salary costs if a highly paid, long-tenured employee is replaced by a new hire (Campion, 1991; Dalton & Todor, 1982). Voluntary turnover can also be considered beneficial if the employee was a poor performer or if the resignation facilitated flexibility or creativity by bringing in 'new blood' (Campion, 1991; Dalton, Todor & Krackhardt, 1982; Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980).

Boudreau and Berger (1985) pointed out the need for a broader perspective on turnover consequences. Their organizational utility perspective considered quantity of movers, the quality of movers, and the costs to produce movement. They expanded traditional utility equations to include not only the replacement employee, but also multiple hiring cohorts, continuous retentions, and repeated acquisitions. Equations use average service values and costs to estimate utility under various rates, distributions, and conditions of turnover. In short, employee turnover may bring benefits to the organization, especially when the selection, training, and other replacement costs are low. These equations provide the most comprehensive model available to evaluate the organizational consequences of turnover. Follow-up research using these equations is scarce, perhaps because obtaining estimates for the many parameters is difficult. Nevertheless, more utility research would facilitate accurate assessment of organizational consequences.

Not all instances of quitting are of equal consequence to the organization. Thus, the major question seems to be, which employees would organizations most want to prevent from quitting? We can answer this question through research on turnover utility at the individual level, including the individual's performance, potential, compensation, and other values, along with these same quantities for the replacement employee. After the question, which turnover *should* be prevented, is adequately answered, two other questions become the central issues for management: Which voluntary turnover can be prevented by the organization, and what are the best methods to do this?

#### Avoidability and Organizational Control

Given the potentially important consequences of voluntary turnover, several researchers have emphasized the avoidability of turnover (Abelson, 1987; Campion, 1991). Dalton, Krackhardt and Porter (1981) suggested a 2 × 2 taxonomy for turnover including avoidability and voluntariness as dimensions. They suggested that those quitting for avoidable reasons are considerably different from both unavoidable leavers and stayers, and they proposed that failing to recognize this distinction may help to explain weak prediction of voluntary turnover. Typically, voluntary turnover that is controllable would be considered more negative by managers than unavoidable turnover (Dalton, Todor & Krackhardt, 1982). Presumably, if there is nothing to be done about a person quitting, the occurrence and its consequences are of less concern.

#### Defining avoidability

Avoidability of an instance of turnover is a matter of perspective; the existing conceptualizations and measures define at least three distinct themes (Abelson, 1987; Campion, 1991; Dalton, Krackhardt & Porter, 1981). They include (a) whether the employee's stated reasons for leaving are organizational or non-work factors, (b) whether the employee believes the organization *would* offer an inducement that would make them stay, and (c) whether or not the organization *actually could* induce the employee to stay.

First, *organization-based reasons* have been thought to indicate avoidable turnover while non-organizational reasons indicate unavoidable turnover (Abelson, 1987; Dalton, Krackhardt & Porter, 1981). Type and origin of reasons are conceptually interesting distinctions but are not directly related to actual avoidability. Using subjective judgments of reasons, Abelson (1987) and Campion (1991) found that those reporting reasons for quitting, judged by management and researchers to be avoidable, had lower satisfaction and commitment than unavoidable leavers and stayers. This seems to confirm that negative attitudes are more associated with organizational reasons than non-work reasons (Dalton, Krackhardt & Porter, 1981).

While non-work reasons may be more difficult for management to learn about or address than organizational reasons, this conceptualization wrongly assumes that non-work reasons for quitting (e.g. family pressure, desire for career change, or desire to relocate) cannot be offset by any potential organizational inducement (Abelson, 1987). This is clearly untrue for certain individuals and situations. In addition, a reason classified as unavoidable for one individual and situation may seem very avoidable for another. Therefore, reasons cannot be judged as avoidable or unavoidable by a researcher naive to the individual circumstances.

Secondly, *perceived avoidability* reflects whether the employee or supervisor believes the company would have been able to do something to make the employee stay. Campion's (1991) continuous measure directly measures level of avoidability as reported by university employees themselves and their supervisors. Although some items about the origin of reasons appeared in the continuous measure, the scales mainly reflect perceived avoidability from the employee's or the supervisor's point of view. He found that perceived avoidability was negatively associated with measures of voluntariness and satisfaction of the employee. Avoidability from the supervisor's perspective was related to lower employee job performance, perhaps suggesting that organizations may decide *not* to avoid the turnover of poor performers.

Although perceived avoidability has yielded some insights, measurement seems to involve some guesswork from respondents about what the organization *would do* realistically. Even though employees felt turnover was more avoidable on average than supervisors (Campion, 1991), both are unlikely to

consider all the potential inducements the organization *actually could* offer. Thereby this measure of avoidability tends to confuse the expected with the possible. Thus, to accurately assess whether turnover is avoidable, the potential of management to offer inducements must be considered.

There is a third interactive perspective that we call *actual avoidability*, which necessarily involves both the individual's and management's input. This perspective assumes that nearly all quitting is potentially avoidable with enough inducement, except for the rare individual whose resolve to quit is unshakable at any price. Actual avoidability essentially reflects whether the organization currently possesses and is willing to offer necessary inducement to the employee, determined through some type of interaction. In short, this perspective changes the meaning of unavoidable turnover, from 'reported reasons originating outside the organization' or 'individual beliefs that the organization would not offer adequate inducement', to instead 'quitting that the organization chooses not to stop (or cannot stop) by way of negotiation and inducements'. Assuming some inducement could be offered, measures might include whether or not the organization will offer the necessary inducement (dichotomous) and the difference between the level of an inducement offered and the level requested by the leaver (continuous).

#### *Methods of control*

Even assuming that all voluntary turnover is avoidable given enough inducements, there has been very little research specifically on which inducements or methods to use. This may be because determining which turnover is most beneficial to stop has been difficult. Several findings do directly address interventions to control turnover. For instance, realistic job previews and job redesign were found in a meta-analysis to improve retention rates by an average of 9% and 17%, respectively (McEvoy & Cascio, 1985). Selection, socialization, rewards, training leaders, flexible scheduling, and career planning are other potential interventions for controlling turnover to test in future research (Mobley, 1982).

#### *Conclusion*

The questions of which turnover is avoidable and how to manage it have been considered but not answered. Turnover reasons and employee perceptions are imperfect substitutes for more direct measures of actual avoidability. Whether an instance of turnover is truly avoidable for the organization depends largely on what inducements management has at its disposal and how much it offers. Inherent in studying this concept of avoidability are the type and level of inducements needed for retention. Therefore, the areas of utility, avoidability, and control are necessarily linked and should not be studied separately as in

the past, but rather as a unified area (i.e. management of voluntary turnover). Management also includes encouraging voluntary turnover, where it has positive utility for the organization. Research is badly needed on which inducements are most effective in preventing or facilitating turnover across various populations and situations.

#### **Model Content**

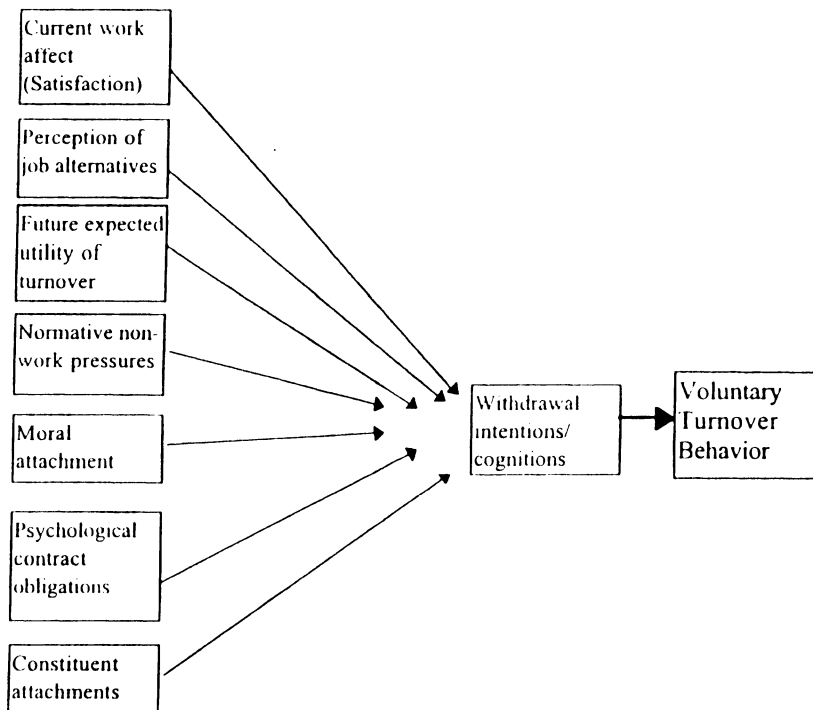
Presumably because understanding and controlling turnover requires some level of predictive success, many empirical studies during this early period attempted to identify bivariate predictors and correlates of voluntary turnover. For reviews of various individual predictors, see for example, Carsten and Spector (1987), Cotton and Tuttle (1986), McEvoy and Cascio (1985, 1987), Michaels and Spector (1982), Mobley et al. (1979), Muchinsky and Tuttle (1979), Porter and Steers (1973), and Schuh (1967). Because many existing reviews already focus on bivariate relationships, we will not specifically focus on them here. Instead, we review major antecedent categories found in voluntary turnover models. These categories equate to distinct types of psychological forces found in the literature that motivate quitting. They are summarized in Figure 2.1.

#### *Withdrawal intentions and cognitions*

Intention to quit has demonstrated the highest, most consistent bivariate relationship to turnover behavior,  $r = 0.50$  (Steel & Ovalle, 1984). Tett and Meyer (1993) reported a meta-analytic correlation between multiple item measures of turnover intention and turnover of  $r = 0.65$ . Other withdrawal cognitions have received considerable attention as predictors as well. Thinking of searching, thinking of quitting, and intention to search have demonstrated consistent, positive correlations with turnover behavior,  $r_s = 0.30-0.50$  (Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia & Griffeth, 1992; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Recently, Hom and Griffeth (1991) proposed that all these cognitions and intentions are part of a single withdrawal cognition syndrome, a proposition that should be tested in the future by confirmatory factor analyses. In summary, turnover intention is the best predictor and the proposed immediate psychological precursor of quitting (Steel & Ovalle, 1984).

#### *Current affect and perceived alternatives*

The main content elements of most models from this period can be linked to March and Simon's (1958) concepts of perceived ease of movement and desirability of movement, which are typically operationalized as work attitudes and perceived alternative opportunities, respectively. Work attitudes such as global satisfaction, facet satisfaction, and organizational commitment have



**Figure 2.1** Major antecedent forces affecting voluntary turnover intentions and decisions

demonstrated moderate negative correlations with turnover (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Muchinsky & Tuttle, 1979; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Number, certainty, or quality of perceived alternative opportunities have demonstrated consistent positive relationships to turnover, although relatively small in magnitude. Steel and Griffeth (1989) and Hom et al. (1992) reported corrected correlations between perceived alternatives and turnover of  $r = 0.13$  and  $r = 0.14$ , respectively. Forrest, Cummings & Johnson (1977) and Price (1977) integrated the psychological and economic perspectives by including both individual attitudes and labor market influences on turnover. Together with turnover intentions and cognitions, affect and alternatives have been the predominant antecedents to turnover in multivariate models (e.g. Bluedorn, 1982; Mobley, 1977; Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980; Price & Mueller, 1981; Steers & Mowday, 1981). However, other distinct antecedents may also impact voluntary turnover decisions.

#### *Future expected utility of turnover*

Forrest, Cummings and Johnson (1977) suggested that anticipated satisfaction was a relevant determinant of turnover, distinct from current affective responses based on past experiences. Mobley et al. (1979) included future evaluations in their model such that future prospects on the current job and those on an alternative job help determine turnover intention. This would include calculation of lost investments in current membership incurred by leaving (Becker, 1960) vs expected future gains from an alternative. Considering both current and alternative jobs, anticipated satisfaction becomes a future expected utility or valence-instrumentality-expectancy calculation (e.g. Vroom, 1964) regarding the choice to stay or leave.

#### *Normative pressures*

Hom, Katerberg and Hulin (1979) and Newman (1974) utilized the Fishbein (1967) model of reasoned action, attempting to predict turnover better than traditional attitude measures. In these models, normative beliefs were antecedents of behavioral intention to turnover. They found that by using normative measures, they explained a higher portion of variance in resignation than with attitude measures alone, a finding that has been replicated (Prestholdt, Lane & Matthews, 1987). In turnover models Fishbein's (1967) normative beliefs are perceived expectations of non-work referents regarding the employee's turnover behavior. Normative beliefs reflect psychological pressure to quit or stay caused by friends and family members, assuming the individual wants to meet their expectations. Normative and non-work influences have been included in other turnover models as well (e.g. Hom, Griffeth & Sellaro, 1984; Mobley et al., 1979). Normative commitment (Wiener, 1982) and work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) further exemplify normative pressures which have been linked to turnover.

#### *Moral attachment*

Hom, Katerberg and Hulin (1979) hypothesized effects for personal moral obligation in their model of reenlistment. A personal norm of loyalty is consistent with a component of 'Triandis' (1975) model of social behavior and with the protestant work ethic (Morrow, 1983). Moral commitment has been negatively linked with turnover as well (Jaros, Jermier, Koehler & Sincich, 1993). Moral attachment, as we call this category, is essentially a value of loyalty or general duty, causing one to persist at an organization. While normative forces depend on beliefs about how *others* feel and would react to one's quitting, moral attachment is an internalized individual value. Thus, it may be more stable across situations than normative pressures. Such moral attachment may be increasingly rare in today's turbulent work environment. Nevertheless, it

should be studied further. Perhaps it can be thought of as a continuum, with the opposite anchor being the internalized value that *changing* jobs is a virtue.

The psychological antecedents just discussed can each be linked directly to behavioral intention through established models of individual behavior (i.e. Fishbein & Azjen, 1975; Triandis, 1975). However, there are other forces in the literature relevant to turnover decisions which do not appear in multivariate turnover models. These include psychological contract perception and attachment caused by relationships with constituents in the organization.

#### *Psychological contract*

Related to equity perceptions is the concept of the psychological contract with the organization (Rousseau & Parks, 1992). A psychological contract is a set of individual beliefs about reciprocal obligations in an employment relationship, not involving a third party observer (Rousseau, 1989). A psychological contract does require accepting a norm of reciprocity (e.g. Scholl, 1981) to some extent and recognizing obligations for both parties. There are two major types of perceived reciprocal obligations between employer and employee (Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994). They may be formalized and transactional (e.g. salary, merit pay, advancement, in exchange for, giving notice, accepting transfers, and keeping company secrets), or they may be less tangible and relational (e.g. job security, training, and career development in exchange for loyalty, overtime, and extra-role behaviors).

Changes in obligations over time seem to be self-serving for the employee. From the employee perspective, their obligations decrease and employer obligations increase with tenure (Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994). Employees may consider tenure itself to be an ongoing input toward fulfillment of their contract obligation. Further, clear failure to meet the employee's expectations under the contract can constitute a violation of the psychological contract, which either decreases the amount the employee feels he or she owes to the organization or invalidates the contract completely. Employer violations were found to be negatively correlated with reported employee relational obligations such as loyalty and extra work hours (Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994). Thus, perceived violations may induce an employee to quit immediately or more readily in the future. Regardless, perceived obligations and violations of a psychological contract that affect quitting should be considered in future turnover models.

#### *Constituent attachments*

Reichers (1985) suggested that employees can become committed to constituencies within the organization (e.g. coworkers, supervisors, mentors, work teams, and unions), beyond commitment to the organization as a whole. If employees do not want to lose valued relationships with individuals and

groups by leaving, they are more psychologically attached to the organization. Voluntary turnover models do not typically consider the impact of an employee's personal relationships, but constituent attachments to supervisors and coworkers have been linked empirically to quitting (Becker, 1992; Graen, Liden & Hoel, 1982; Hunt & Morgan, 1994; Krackhardt & Porter, 1985). These constituent attachments do not simply equate to facets of satisfaction. Following Meyer and Allen's (1991) conceptualization of organizational commitment, attachment to other referents may include calculative and normative components, as well as affective commitment (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993). These three psychological effects should be studied in the future to test if they are valid components of attachment for different organizational constituents.

Hunt and Morgan (1994) tested a mediated effects vs an independent effects model for constituent commitments. They claimed their findings support that constituent commitment effects are mediated by global organizational commitment. However, this conclusion is based not on statistical nested model comparisons, but only on numerical differences on several fit indices. Also, they did not test a partially mediated model at all, so the nature of constituent effects is still in question. One can easily imagine a situation where a person stays because of certain work relationships but dislikes the organization as a whole (Reichers, 1986), implying distinct effects. In any case, the number, directionality, and nature of constituent effects require more research in order to fully understand turnover decisions.

#### *Conclusion*

Even the most comprehensive turnover conceptualizations (e.g. Mobley et al., 1979; Price & Mueller, 1981; Steers & Mowday, 1981) exclude some of the antecedent categories in Figure 2.1. To increase understanding of different types of turnover decisions, future studies should simultaneously consider all the psychological forces that may impact the turnover decision. If this is not done, empirical studies of models risk estimation problems from omitting relevant causal variables (James, 1982). Researchers have bemoaned the lack of explained variance in turnover behavior by existing models (e.g. Hom, Griffeth & Sellarro, 1984; Hom et al., 1992; Peters & Sheridan, 1988). The exclusion of turnover antecedents may leave systematic variance in turnover behavior unexplained. Perhaps then turnover behavior can be better predicted and understood through a more comprehensive consideration of psychological antecedents.

#### **Process Models**

With the main antecedent forces in traditional models identified, the remaining variations primarily involve the different causal linkages among antecedents. Several other reviews focus on variations in multivariate models

(Baysinger & Mobley, 1983; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Steers & Mowday, 1981), but none reviews all the major advances found in the process models of this period. Mobley's (1977) intermediate linkage model is the prototype of process models. Its variations have probably received the most research attention of all major conceptualizations. This section reviews process models in terms of their variation from and advancement beyond Mobley (1977). We also review the interaction of affect and alternatives in the decision process, the proposed adaptation-withdrawal process, and other key process developments.

#### *Intermediate linkage models*

Based on the assumption that intent to quit or stay is the cognitive event immediately preceding turnover behavior, Mobley's (1977) model proposed the intermediate linkages in the voluntary turnover decision between dissatisfaction and intention to quit. Following an evaluation of the job, experienced dissatisfaction leads to withdrawal cognitions, which lead to an evaluation of the utility of a job search. A positive utility yields an intent to search for a job followed by the search itself. Subsequently, an evaluation occurs of the alternative(s) found comparing it to the current job. An unfavorable comparison leads to an intention to quit, then leading to voluntary turnover. Mobley (1977) proposed feedback loops in which each construct can have a residual effect on preceding constructs. He recognized that not all employees follow the proposed progression to quitting but did not discuss specific alternative progressions. In addition, Mobley (1977) conceded that impulsive quitting may occur in an entirely different way than the proposed step-by-step process. Nevertheless, the basic linkages proposed are logical and compelling.

In their expanded model, Mobley et al. (1979) added that individual values, job perceptions, and labor market perceptions determine (a) expected utility of the current job, (b) expected utility of alternatives, and (c) current job satisfaction. These three elements combine to determine withdrawal intentions, presumably by way of linkages proposed in Mobley (1977). Mobley et al. (1979) also suggested that organizational level factors and economic factors influence quitting *indirectly* through their effects on job perceptions and labor market perceptions, respectively. In his integrative model, Bluedorn (1982) added organizational commitment between job satisfaction and job search in the Mobley, Horner and Hollingsworth (1978) version of the intermediate linkage model. Price and Mueller (1981) and Williams and Hazer (1986) also supported a causal path from job satisfaction to organizational commitment in turnover models. However, other effects have been proposed for the two variables as well.

In general, Mobley's (1977) model and its subsequent variations have received some empirical support (e.g. Hom, Griffeth & Sellaro, 1984; Hom et al., 1992; Miller, Katerberg & Hulin, 1979; Mobley, Horner & Hollingsworth,

1978; Youngblood, Mobley & Meglino, 1983). Using meta-analysis and structural equation modeling in combination, Hom et al. (1992) tested competing variations of intermediate linkages. These included Mobley, Horner and Hollingsworth (1978), Hom, Griffeth & Sellaro (1984), Bannister and Griffeth (1986), and Dalessio, Silverman and Schuck (1986). They concluded that the Dalessio, Silverman and Schuck (1986) model and the Hom, Griffeth and Sellaro (1984) model fit the meta-analytic data better than Mobley, Horner and Hollingsworth (1978), and much better than Bannister and Griffeth (1986). They supported all paths in both models except the path from search intention to turnover in Hom, Griffeth and Sellaro (1984). Even more consistent empirical support exists across studies for the reduced linkage model presented in Hom et al. (1992, p. 905): dissatisfaction → withdrawal cognitions → turnover. Although the integrative Mobley et al. (1979) model and other variations are more theoretically interesting, this reduced model is our most empirically defensible representation of the basic steps in the decision process. Future research should build on this reduced model when investigating additional linkages and their relative merits.

In summary, intermediate linkage research started to examine the steps in the turnover decision process. At the same time, models with variations in one or more linkages have received support as well. This has created confusion about which variation is most accurate. Moreover, the survey data used in past empirical studies do not directly examine how the decision process occurs. This approach only measures current standing on hypothetical psychological steps assumed to occur in the employee's mind. Studies then suggest that a relationship between these measures indicates that a certain psychological process occurred. This type of indirect evidence leaves uncertainty about which steps, if any, actually occur during the turnover decision process. Little research has actually attempted to directly assess the steps that employees go through during quit decisions, a deficiency that must be addressed in the future.

#### *Alternatives, affect, and turnover*

Models have made incremental conceptual contributions beyond intermediate linkages alone, including the relationships among alternatives, affect, and turnover. In Mobley (1977) negative affect causes thinking of quitting, while perceived alternatives seem to have two distinct effects. First, general perceptions of the labor market may influence search utility and search intentions (Hom, Griffeth & Sellaro, 1984; Mobley et al., 1979). Second, specific perceived alternatives may be compared with the current job to determine turnover intentions.

Muchinsky and Morrow (1980) proposed a model which includes individual factors, work-related factors, and economic opportunity factors as precursors to turnover. They proposed that alternative opportunities have the strongest *direct* impact on turnover behavior, and they deemphasized the

behavioral intention construct as the single precursor to turnover. In addition, Muchinsky and Morrow (1980) suggest that individual and work-related factors interact and have effects on turnover, mediated through opportunities. Michaels and Spector (1982) also posited that alternative opportunities have a direct positive influence on turnover behavior, not mediated through satisfaction or intention.

Work by Thibaut and Kelly (1959) on attitudes suggests that alternatives may be a determinant of job affect, namely that more and better job opportunities lead to greater dissatisfaction with the current job. The Hulin, Roznowski and Hachiya (1985) integrative model proposed that favorable market conditions increase the value of employee inputs and thus the opportunity costs for staying. Simultaneously, it also raises the frame of reference for evaluating the current job outcomes, resulting in relative devaluation of these outcomes. High alternatives may inflate the perceived value of inputs and decrease the perceived value of outcomes, lowering current satisfaction and encouraging termination. Bluedorn's (1982) model also proposed that the effect of alternative job opportunities on turnover is mediated through job satisfaction. Empirical research has also supported this effect of perceived alternatives through satisfaction (Dalessio, Silverman & Schuck, 1986; Martin, 1979; Price & Mueller, 1981).

Job alternatives have also been proposed to interact with satisfaction (Price, 1977) and with turnover intentions (Steers & Mowday, 1981) in causing turnover. Researchers have argued (a) that low perceived alternatives block the enacting of withdrawal intentions (Hom, Griffeth & Sellaro, 1984) or (b) that high unemployment 'discourages dissatisfied employees from developing firm decisions to seek alternatives or to resign' (Hom et al., 1992, p. 893). Conversely, when the perceived number or quality of alternatives is high, predictor relationships are stronger because attitudes and intentions can be enacted more easily. This perspective, if true, implies that people are generally risk averse in turnover decisions. This may be somewhat contrary to the finding that between 50% and 60% of employees reported quitting without having another job lined up (Matilla, 1974).

In conclusion, several relationships among alternatives, affect, and turnover have emerged in models, besides those based on Mobley (1977). Perceived alternatives may act directly on turnover behavior, they may influence turnover through satisfaction, or they may moderate the effects of affect or intentions on quitting. Competitive testing of these proposed relationships must be done in the future to accurately examine their relative validity.

In addition, general market perceptions vs crystallized expectations of specific work alternatives should be differentiated by their effects on the process (Griffeth & Hom, 1988). For instance, general perceptions of alternatives may influence search motivation and intention, while specific alternatives may be directly compared to the current job in an expectancy calculation. Low certainty in an alternative would cause calculation of outcomes for the specific

alternative to drop (e.g. Vroom, 1964), and a generalized perception of alternatives may operate in place of a comparison between specific job opportunities. Number vs quality of perceived alternatives should also prove relevant (Price & Mueller, 1981). This suggests two dimensions for perceived alternatives: (a) general market perceptions vs uncertain specific alternatives vs certain specific alternatives (offers in hand) and (b) number of alternatives vs quality of alternatives. These dimensions of perceived alternatives may help to clarify the decision process.

#### *Adaptation withdrawal construct*

Other process models in this period relate to the idea of a single withdrawal construct driving the turnover decision. Fishbein and Azjen (1975) stated that general attitudes should relate strongly to a class of behavioral responses, not to specific behaviors. Following this line of reasoning it was suggested that empirical research on work attitudes should relate them to a pattern or syndrome of withdrawal, rather than quitting or absenteeism behaviors alone (Hulin, 1991). Proponents have argued that behaviors such as quitting, absenteeism, lateness, and other dysfunctional behaviors are different manifestations of a single adaptation withdrawal construct, serving to distance the employee from the organization.

In addition to traditional withdrawal behaviors, general adaptation-withdrawal responses may include input reduction and psychological withdrawal (daydreaming, shirking), behaviors to change job outcomes (stealing, moonlighting on the job), behaviors to change the work role itself (unionization, transfer attempts), retaliatory measures (sabotage, violence), or other cognitive adjustments. These behaviors purportedly stem from relative dissatisfaction and fulfill the same basic purpose—adapting to a dissatisfying work situation (Rosse & Hulin, 1985; Rosse & Miller, 1984). The choice of behaviors depends on a number of perceived opportunity constraints and personal factors (Rosse & Miller, 1984), and their future use depends on their success in improving relative satisfaction (Rosse & Hulin, 1985).

Several theoretical relations among the withdrawal behaviors have been suggested (e.g. Beehr & Gupta, 1978; Gupta & Jenkins, 1980; Hulin, 1991). These include (a) substitutability of behaviors, (b) compensatory relations, (c) spillover relations, and (d) a progression of withdrawal. The first two relations suggest that as one withdrawal behavior is enacted others are less likely to occur. They imply negative correlations among absence, lateness, and quitting. Such negative correlations have not been found. Spillover relations mean that the probability of one behavior increases in the presence of others, whereas a progression of withdrawal implies that withdrawal behaviors occur in a specific order over time. Some empirical evidence supports a progression of withdrawal (Mitra, Jenkins & Gupta, 1992; Rosse, 1988). For example, Rosse (1988) found evidence of a progression of lateness to absence, and from



multiple absences to quitting. However, this study used a small sample ( $n = 63$ ) of hospital employees, and these findings should be replicated before they are generalized.

There has been some support for the validity of a withdrawal construct, primarily indirect evidence in the form of significant shared variance among withdrawal behaviors (e.g. Mitra, Jenkins & Gupta, 1992). In contrast, Steers and Mowday (1981) and others (e.g. Mobley, 1982; Price & Mueller, 1981) have argued that alternative withdrawal behaviors are separate and distinct behaviors from voluntary turnover and should be studied separately. In support, work affect has demonstrated different relationships with absenteeism, lateness, and turnover (Clegg, 1983; Porter & Steers, 1973). Also, variables such as company absence policy may significantly affect absence frequency, but not quit rates. Mobley (1982) argued that both absenteeism and turnover may result from attraction to alternatives, thus 'withdrawal' may not accurately describe the motivation behind these behaviors. Finally, possible third variable causes which may drive covariation between withdrawal behaviors have not been properly investigated in most studies (Clegg, 1983).

Despite some empirical support and significant conceptual development for the adaptation-withdrawal construct, these contrary arguments cannot be ignored. This suggests that fair competitive tests against alternative models should be conducted. Designing research to test the cyclical and progressive nature of adaptation-withdrawal is extremely challenging (Rosse & Hulin, 1985). Nevertheless, more creative research data and designs are needed to confirm, refute, or modify the general adaptation-withdrawal theory.

#### *Other developments*

The idea of multiple decision paths to voluntary turnover was introduced during this period. Steers and Mowday's (1981) model proposed that for some intention to quit leads directly to quitting. For others, intention to quit activates a search for and consideration of alternatives. They imply that turnover does not occur without an alternative, a view disputed by some (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). Regardless, Steers and Mowday (1981) introduced unprecedented complexity in their model by including two distinct decision paths.

In another conceptual advance, Sheridan and Abelson (1983) suggested that the turnover process may not be a linear progression of steadily decreasing satisfaction or increasing opportunities, as is assumed in most models. Instead, they suggested that there may be discontinuous changes in turnover propensity when threshold levels on antecedents are reached. For instance, a slight negative change in affect can become a catalyst that pushes the employee over the threshold, making turnover imminent. To test these ideas, Sheridan and Abelson (1983) and Sheridan (1985) fitted catastrophe models to antecedent data. They generally indicated support for their catastrophe models, implying a non-linear threshold relationship between control

variables and withdrawal. However, the analyses that led to these conclusions involved some subjective placement of the bifurcation plane which directly impacts the results. Non-linear, threshold progression to quitting remains a provocative idea which needs to be tested more in the future.

#### *Conclusion*

Though no single process model achieved dominance empirically, variations of Mobley's (1977) model were most influential and most often studied. Intermediate linkages between affect and turnover, multiple proposed effects for perceived alternatives and affect, a general adaptation-withdrawal process, multiple decision paths, and discontinuous progressions toward quitting were each valuable conceptual advances which should be built on in the future. Despite these considerable contributions of multivariate models, a somewhat simplistic view of quitting was portrayed in most models. With few exceptions, traditional models have assumed a step-by-step, rational, decision process which has never been directly validated. The actual sequences of cognitive steps or linkages posited in variations of Mobley's (1977) model have not been tested directly, only indirectly by survey analyses. Moreover, Lee and Mitchell (1994) state: 'In short, over 17 years of research on traditional turnover models suggests that many employees may leave organizations in ways not specified by the traditional models' (p. 56). To help address this dilemma, we conclude that models of the quitting process must be integrated and expanded.

In addition, research on the quitting process could include more qualitative studies. Although this may seem remedial in such a well-studied area, qualitative methods have not been used much. For instance, diaries on thoughts about organization membership can be kept by employees during their tenure, and interviews can be conducted with those who are quitting regarding their decision process (e.g. Lee, Mitchell, Wise & Fireman, 1996). Without such studies we cannot uncover the full depth and complexity of the decision process.

## RECENT STUDIES

Chronologically, we define recent studies roughly as those published during the late 1980s through the middle 1990s. This distinction conveys that recent research on voluntary turnover has moved in new directions. In this period research has focused primarily on moderators and macro factors, methodological issues, and further theoretical development. This research comes in the wake of several realizations about most turnover research prior to this period. First, 'box and line' models proposing antecedents of turnover are many, but coherent theories considering moderators and macro factors are

few. Second, research methods for predictive turnover studies have been somewhat flawed or inappropriate, yielding limited knowledge and thwarting empirical prediction (Morita, Lee & Mowday, 1989; Peters & Sheridan, 1988). Third, existing models seem generally to underestimate the complexity of turnover decisions which occur in different populations of employees (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). These issues drive the major contributions in recent years, which are reviewed in the following sections. We also review some recent studies on how job search relates to the turnover process.

### Moderators, Macro Factors, and Methodological Issues

#### *Time lag and base rate*

Early research (e.g. Mobley et al., 1979; Steel & Ovalle, 1984) recognized that the greater the time lag between predictor measurement and turnover occurrence and the more the base rate of quitting departs from 50%, the weaker the empirical prediction. Greater time lag may neutralize the effectiveness of short-term predictors such as intention (Steel & Ovalle, 1984). Base rates well below or well above 50% restrict range in criterion variance, reduce the effect sizes, and lower statistical power. Smaller relationships with greater time lags and lower base rates have been found for several turnover predictors and situations (Carsten & Spector, 1987; Hom et al., 1992; Steel & Ovalle, 1984). Moreover, if time lags are shortened to improve prediction, there is likely to be a low base rate of employees quitting, resulting once again in attenuated relationships. It seems that time lag and base rate considerations can act as a 'catch 22' in predictive studies. Until recently though, research has not focused specifically on how these interrelated factors jointly impact findings on voluntary turnover.

In their recent meta-analysis, Steel, Hendrix and Balogh (1990) examined the possible confounding effect of base rate on the time-lag moderation effect proposed by Steel and Ovalle (1984). As in this earlier meta-analysis, Steel, Hendrix and Balogh (1990) corrected for the effect size restriction of a point-biserial correlation (which has a maximum magnitude of 0.798). A significant positive correlation between study time lag and study base rate was detected, and base rate was found to have larger biasing effects in smaller samples (Steel, Hendrix & Balogh, 1990). They confirmed that greater time lag decreased the intentions-turnover and global satisfaction-turnover relationships, even after controlling for base rate. Evidently, confounding between base rate and time lag did not fully account for time lag moderation effects (e.g. Carsten & Spector, 1987; Steel & Ovalle, 1984). As a result, future research should consider both base rate and time-lag moderation in turnover prediction. In contrast, Steel, Hendrix and Balogh (1990) observed no time-lag moderation effect for organizational commitment and satisfaction with work itself, contrary to findings on global satisfaction and intentions. This

finding offers hope of better prediction over considerable time lags, suggesting that certain predictors may be more or less effective depending on when they are measured with respect to subsequent turnover behavior.

#### *Unemployment*

Although effects of perceived alternatives were discussed earlier, it is useful to consider separately the moderating effects of the labor market, beyond their psychological impact on the decision process. As Steel and Griffeth (1989) point out, the labor market rates can have several effects, impacting predictive relationships. Predictors such as intentions and perceived alternatives should display greater variance in low unemployment environments, leading to better prediction. Also, marginal drifters, who may quit within a short time, may be differentially lured into the workplace during low unemployment, further increasing base rates overall (Hulin, Roznowski & Hachiya, 1985).

Empirically, there is considerable evidence that the intentions turnover relationship is weaker with scarce job opportunities (Carsten & Spector, 1987; Gerhart, 1990). In their meta-analysis, Hom et al. (1992) found a more complex moderating effect for unemployment. Occupational unemployment (i.e. unemployment within job type) weakens the satisfaction-withdrawal cognitions relationship as expected, but contrary to prediction, it *strengthens*: (a) the satisfaction-turnover, (b) the probability of alternatives-withdrawal cognitions, and (c) the probability of alternatives-turnover relationships (see also, Steel & Griffeth, 1989). They demonstrated that national and regional unemployment moderate these latter relationships, but in the opposite direction from occupational unemployment. Also, occupational unemployment appears to be the stronger moderator in general than these other unemployment indicators (Carsten & Spector, 1987; Hom et al., 1992; Steel & Griffeth, 1989), suggesting that opportunities within job title are more relevant in turnover considerations than aggregated rates across occupations.

The large unemployment rate-aggregate turnover relationship (e.g. Eagly, 1965) and the small perceived alternatives-individual turnover relationship are well known findings. In explaining the discrepancy, Hulin, Roznowski and Hachiya (1985) suggested that low unemployment and the resulting availability of jobs may attract transient employees into the workforce who would be more likely to quit, regardless of their work perceptions. Thus, smaller predictive relationships for perceived alternatives could be partially explained by the failure of individual measures to capture this effect. Also, actual labor market conditions do not transfer directly into employee perceptions of their *personal* alternative opportunities (Gerhart, 1990). That is, employees may have inaccurate information or may feel that they are different from typical job seekers in the market. Therefore, labor market conditions may not be translated into psychological perceptions of alternatives. Steel and Griffeth (1989) proposed two other methodological problems which may also help to explain

the discrepancy. First, in the typical one or two occupation studies interoccupational variance in labor market unemployment is untapped by perceptual measures of alternatives, while this variance is captured at the aggregate level. Second, differences across studies in measures of perceived alternatives may obscure relationships, while measures of unemployment are more consistent.

These arguments may suggest that labor market effects be explicitly considered in future predictive studies, even beyond the psychological effects of perceived alternatives. Types of unemployment also need to be differentiated (Steel & Griffeth, 1989). In particular, the apparently contrasting effects of occupational unemployment vs regional and national unemployment should be investigated further.

#### *Organizational culture*

Abelson and Baysinger (1984) generally called for a more organization-level perspective on turnover because the preponderance of models have been concerned with the individual level. Organization-level variables have been positively linked to turnover including high centralization, high routinization, low integration, low communication, and policy knowledge (Mobley, 1982; Price, 1977; Price & Mueller, 1981). However, these have typically been thought to influence turnover through individual satisfaction (Bluedorn, 1982; Price, 1977) or other psychological factors, not directly. One proposed explanation of direct organizational culture influences on turnover is that retention depends on some degree of employee fit with the organization's culture. Thus, findings on person-organization fit and retention are relevant to this perspective. For example, O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991) found that misfits on organization values terminated slightly faster than fits, but only after 20 months of tenure.

Alternatively, other researchers have suggested that organizational culture values influence turnover through determining human resource strategies and policies. These create an organizational environment either opposing or encouraging voluntary turnover (Kerr & Slocum, 1987; Kopelman, Brief & Guzzo, 1990). Kerr and Slocum (1987) proposed that cultural values of teamwork, security, and respect for individuals would foster loyalty and greater retention than values of initiative and individual rewards. Using accounting professionals, Sheridan (1992) confirmed that a culture emphasizing interpersonal relationships improved retention by an average of 14 months. However, he warns that the strong findings for cultural values may not generalize beyond relatively mobile occupations. Sheridan (1992) went on to question the relative efficacy of the fit perspective, citing smaller effects for value fit (i.e. O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991) than those discovered in his study.

Abelson (1993) proposed how a turnover culture may develop based on Schein's (1985) three-level model of organizational culture. According to Abelson (1993), turnover cultures exist where systematic patterns of shared

cognitions influence turnover decisions. Briefly, these phenomena evolve through sense-making and social information processes. First, organization 'artifacts and creations' are interpreted by employees through sense-making cognitions and schemas. Interpretations are communicated and shared within and across organizational groups, leading to commonly held assumptions and higher order schemata relating to organizational movement. Finally, systematic patterns of these shared beliefs emerge, forming an organizational turnover culture which subsequently influences employee turnover decisions.

#### *National culture*

Theoretical models developed in English-speaking countries, as most turnover models are, can be ethnocentric (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991) and may not apply abroad (Hofstede, 1983). With the overwhelming movement toward a global business environment, turnover models that may not transfer to other cultures could limit understanding and control of voluntary turnover in those cultures. Differences in values (Hofstede, 1980) and social norms (Triandis, 1989) across cultures may influence quitting in a number of ways. For example, some cultures may value loyalty to the organization more than others (Randall, 1993). Or, certain psychological forces may be more salient and therefore more highly weighted in their contribution to turnover decisions (Davidson, Jaccard, Triandis, Morales & Diaz-Guerrero, 1976). Specifically, normative forces are likely to be very important for turnover decisions in collectivist cultures, perhaps more than in individualist cultures such as the US (Triandis, 1989). In support, Maertz, Stevens, Campion, and Fernandez (1996) found that family-related pressures were the most frequently reported reasons for voluntary turnover among Mexican laborers. Unfortunately, existing turnover models do not include such direct or moderating effects of national culture. We must recognize cultural factors as potential influencers of voluntary turnover in our conceptual models, if these models are to be relevant in today's global organization.

#### *Survival analysis*

Peters and Sheridan (1988) partly attribute poor turnover prediction to the flawed, but typical, cross-sectional window design. In this design predictors are measured at time 1 and turnover instances that occur before time 2 are included. This design with its single antecedent measurement prevents causal inference or investigation of how the process unfolds. In addition to these obvious limitations, Peters and Sheridan's (1988) main criticisms involve three design limitations in the traditional predictive time 1 - time 2 measurement window design: arbitrary choice of the length of measurement window, right censorship of termination dates (i.e. some study participants quit after the study ends), and left censorship of hire dates (i.e. those hired after the

study began may quit during the measurement window but are not included). Specifically, the arbitrary choices of time 1 predictor measurement and length of the measurement window (time 2 – time 1), as well as the company hiring rate just prior to time 1 measurement, directly influence the composition of the stayer and leaver groups. Thus, the significance and possibly the direction of predictive relationships can depend on arbitrary design choices often made based on convention or convenience. Consequently, Peters and Sheridan (1988) caution strongly against this traditional cross-sectional window design. Some adjustments within the design may help address low base rate problems and cohort effects. For instance, the measurement window should be long enough to allow for the turnover base rate to approach 50%, and employee tenure should be used as a covariate. However, to fully consider the flow of employees through organizations and the effects of time, survival analysis is needed.

Analysis of survival or wastage functions has been recognized for some time as a useful method for analyzing turnover (Price, 1976). Survival analysis, above all, allows for consideration of the time period during which an individual quits with respect to tenure stage and time of predictor measurement (Peters & Sheridan, 1988). Unlike other methods of integrating time, survival analysis has the unique advantage of using more available information through allowing estimation of survival functions on attenuated data (right or left censored). Time needs to be formally considered in our theories and research methods in order to understand causal relationships in the turnover process (Hom et al., 1992; Morita, Lee & Mowday, 1989). Survival analysis allows testing of hypotheses concerning the differential strength of various antecedents over time and the average length of time until turnover for various subgroups.

Morita, Lee and Mowday (1989) demonstrated an application of survival analysis in which, 'turnover may be viewed as a process whose intensity (rate) is allowed to vary over time rather than remain fixed' (p. 280). They explained the calculation of survivor or hazard functions which describe the unconditional probability of staying or turning over as of time  $t$ . Survival analysis allows study of situations where the fluctuations in turnover rate vary with time  $t$ . It also allows comparison of separate functions for subject groupings of interest using the log rank statistic (Morita, Lee & Mowday, 1989). For instance, the survival functions of high and low commitment groups of clerical employees (Kline & Peters, 1991) and of Air Force cadets (Lee, Ashford, Walsh & Mowday, 1992) have been found to differ significantly. Because of its ability to handle censored data and address temporal effects, survival analysis should be utilized in predictive research to test time-based hypotheses on turnover.

#### Lee and Mitchell's (1994) Unfolding Model

Departing from traditional process models (e.g. Mobley, 1977), Lee and Mitchell (1994) introduced a new decision-making perspective to the

turnover research utilizing multiple decision paths and drawing on Image Theory (e.g. Beach, 1990; Beach & Mitchell, 1996). They proposed that turnover decisions may not involve extensive evaluation or even choice. Decisions may be automatic or script-driven and may be a product of any one of several decision strategies, most having different aims than expected utility maximization alone (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). Lee and Mitchell (1994) also develop the idea of 'shocks to the system' (p. 60) which are distinguishable events that jar employees to deliberate judgments about their employment. Five different decision paths are proposed which may be followed by an employee who is quitting. These paths vary on whether a shock to the system occurs, whether negative affect is present, and whether a consideration of alternatives occurs in the turnover decision process. Also, one path involves automatic enactment of a behavioral script for quitting. This represents a radical departure from previous rational economic perspectives.

Lee et al. (1996) attempted a preliminary test of the multi-path model. Using a qualitative interview methodology with nurses, they sought to assess whether the taxonomy of decision paths is consistent with reports about turnover decisions. The paths proposed by Lee and Mitchell (1994) were generally found to exist and thus received preliminary support, with several notable exceptions. Scripts, negative affect, and evaluation of alternatives seemed to be more prevalent and to occur in more decision paths than hypothesized. Lee et al. (1996) claimed their findings suggest that employees may switch paths during the turnover decision process. This may indicate that even more decision options exist than have been proposed in the Lee and Mitchell (1994) unfolding model.

In general, this area of research demonstrates that the turnover decision process may be considerably more complex than indicated in early models. In addition to multiple decision paths, Lee, Mitchell, and colleagues enumerated parameters of the turnover process that can no longer be ignored in efforts to understand the process. These include (a) the speed of the decision, (b) the presence or absence of shocks as catalysts, (c) the presence or absence of affect in the decision, (d) the presence or absence of consideration of job alternatives, and (e) automatic scripted decision processes. Future research is needed on these concepts and on Lee and Mitchell's (1994) model paths versus alternative path structures.

#### Job Search and Voluntary Turnover

Much research on job search has been linked with job choice (e.g. Schwab, Rynes & Aldag, 1987) and not specifically with turnover. However, job search has been included as a variable in some of the earliest turnover models (e.g. March & Simon, 1958) and was hypothesized as an intermediate link between dissatisfaction and turnover behavior (Mobley, 1977). In some studies, it has been superior as a predictor of turnover behavior even to turnover intentions

(Bretz, Boudreau & Judge, 1994). Although it has been widely held that job search precedes intentions to quit, turnover intentions can crystallize before search behavior occurs (Hom et al., 1992; Kirschenbaum & Weisberg, 1994; Steers & Mowday, 1981), and that search may have direct effects on turnover (Bretz, Boudreau & Judge, 1994). Because the ordering of job search both prior to intentions and following intentions has been supported, the role of job search in the turnover process is still largely unresolved. Fortunately, recent research has more fully addressed the antecedents, dimensions, and measurement of job search and its relation to quitting.

Bretz, Boudreau and Judge (1994) suggested that job search should be considered separately from turnover models alone because there are other purposes for job search besides turnover. For instance, search may be a tool for evaluating one's current situation with respect to the relevant market or for collecting bargaining information, and not necessarily an attempt to acquire another job (e.g. Hulin, 1991; Kirschenbaum & Weisberg, 1994). Bretz, Boudreau and Judge (1994) suggested that two types of antecedents to job search exist, 'pull' motivations external to the organization and 'push' motivations originating within the current organization. They found that push factors seem most influential on search motivation, consistent with the finding that job-motivated turnover is most predictable from job search measures (Blau, 1993).

Bretz, Boudreau and Judge (1994) also criticized past research for focusing on the unemployed who have relatively more motivation to search than the employed, and for focusing on low-level employees with relatively less human capital and opportunities. These weaknesses call into question the generalizability of past findings on employee job search. Among employed managers, human capital was negatively related to search but positively related to turnover (Bretz, Boudreau & Judge, 1994). This suggests that higher level employees may not need to engage in extensive search in order to find an alternative or to quit. Informal information gathering may take the place of formal search in some jobs. This implication is supported in the recruiting literature by findings on the pervasive use of informal sources of job information (e.g. Rynes, 1991). Moreover, different types and measures of job search with differential effects on the turnover process have been hypothesized (Blau, 1993; Kirschenbaum & Weisberg, 1994; Soelberg, 1967).

Two stages of search, preparatory and active, have been suggested previously (Bowen, 1982; Soelberg, 1967). Drawing on past measures of preparatory and active search behaviors (e.g. Kanfer & Hulin, 1985; Vinokur & Caplan, 1987), Blau (1993) created an overall search scale. Using nurses and insurance agents, he supported the proposed three-factor structure with preparatory job search behavior, active job search behavior, and general effort job search as the factors. Blau (1993) also confirmed the hypothesis that active job search behavior has the strongest relationship with voluntary turnover of the three types, and that it has incremental predictive validity beyond work

attitudes and withdrawal cognitions. Presumably, this stronger relationship occurs because active search is measured as frequency of formal search behaviors, not as general attitudes or preparatory activities. Perhaps when formal search behaviors are performed rather than preparatory behaviors, more behavioral commitment to quitting is created (Salancik, 1977). In short, Blau (1993) suggested that his results point to a more lengthy two-stage job search process than that typically reflected in existing turnover models (cf Bowen, 1982; Soelberg, 1967). If true, management could potentially have more control by diagnosing preparatory stages of job search and offering inducements to discourage active search. Establishing the efficacy of such policies, the accuracy of a two-stage search model, and the validity of Blau's (1993) measures will require more research, however.

Kirschenbaum and Weisberg (1994) conceptualized active and passive search on a continuum rather than dichotomously and identified time and effort as distinct dimensions of search behaviors. They also called for greater refinement of traditional causal orderings of search intentions and turnover behavior. Findings on Israeli textile workers indicated that actual search was more frequent in employees with long tenure. This is consistent with the established negative relationship between tenure and turnover (e.g. Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). However, actual search behavior failed to add incrementally to prediction of turnover beyond attitudes and biodata variables (Kirschenbaum & Weisberg, 1994). The authors stated that this may have been a partial result of few concrete alternatives existing in the market for this sample.

Despite some equivocal findings, Kirschenbaum and Weisberg (1994) suggested a provocative causal ordering of proposed constructs: passive preparatory search activity leads to perceptions of alternatives, which contribute to formation of turnover intentions, which lead to active search behavior, which in turn identify actual alternatives and trigger turnover decisions. Also, this model challenges the widely held assumption that turnover intention alone is the only proximal cause of quitting behavior (e.g. Fishbein & Azjen, 1975; Mobley et al., 1979; Newman, 1974; Steel & Ovalle, 1984).

This recent research on job search and turnover suggests several important questions for the future study of voluntary turnover. First, this research and Steers and Mowday (1981) seem to assume that alternative opportunities are very important in the turnover process, contrary to models in which alternatives are not even considered. Are alternatives always considered in the process or not? Second, do organizational or job-related reasons lead to search more than 'pull' forces do? Third, are preparatory and active search behaviors distinct or do they exist on a continuum? Within these categories, the dimensions of amount of time spent and amount of effort exerted should be used to refine job search measures. Finally, does active job search occur with differential frequency or lead to turnover differentially depending on occupation, job level, or other factors?

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Organizational psychology has learned a great deal about voluntary employee turnover. However, turnover consequences, avoidability, and management control have been seriously understudied. These topics deserve further research attention because they are among the most important issues for organizations. Major categories of antecedents were reviewed, including some forgotten in most models such as non-work pressures, psychological contract obligations, and constituent attachments. To understand why some employees stay with an organization when they are dissatisfied with their job and when they have alternatives available, all relevant forces must be considered (Scholl, 1981). Despite the extensive research on models, empirical relationships with voluntary turnover behavior have been modest, with usually no more than 25% of variance explained. Overlooking macro influences and using suboptimal designs, often with low power, may help to explain some of the poor predictive results at the individual level. Regardless, even the best traditional models seem to inadequately reflect the complex nature of employee quit decisions. Lee and Mitchell's (1994) unfolding model moves beyond such traditional models by explicitly considering less rational decision-making processes and positing five different decision paths. Despite these valuable contributions, several questions remain regarding Lee and Mitchell (1994) and Lee et al. (1996) which need to be addressed in future modeling.

First, their model does not integrate psychological content specifically (i.e. what are the different motivations for quitting and how do they impact the various paths?), thereby failing to reflect the variety of distinct antecedents influencing turnover that have appeared in the literature. Until these different psychological forces are included in future models, the turnover decision cannot be fully understood. Perhaps the psychological forces could be integrated into Lee and Mitchell (1994) as different types of shocks experienced or as categories of images.

Second, their model holds that negative affect does not enter the decision to quit in combination with automatic, script-driven quitting. It also seems to classify inappropriately, in that script-driven path, both quitting which is simply planned in advance and quitting which is quick or reflexive in nature (Lee et al., 1996). We believe that these may represent distinct processes of quitting and both should be studied further. Also, affect (particularly negative affect) may potentially enter any turnover decision, automatic or not, depending on individual characteristics and situational factors.

Third, the distinction between general impressions of job opportunities and having an actual alternative in hand is ignored. This could be a crucial distinction to the employee's decision, possibly determining whether the process is speculative and based on an evaluation of general opportunities, or calculative and based on a comparison to a specific alternative job. In the current climate of uncertainty, we believe very few employees have never considered an

alternative to their current job at some point. Yet Lee and Mitchell (1994) propose three out of five decision paths where no alternatives are evaluated, leading to the conclusion that the role of alternatives may need to be considered more carefully.

In addition to further development of Lee and Mitchell (1994), there are several other issues that need to be addressed in future turnover research.

1. Future models should consider Sheridan and Abelson's (1983) idea that there are threshold levels on antecedents and multiple equilibrium states with regard to turnover likelihood. This will add complexity to already complex models and such propositions are difficult to test. Nevertheless, non-linear progressions may reflect the reality of turnover decisions and should be investigated. Also, the adaptation-withdrawal process should be tested more competitively against alternative perspectives in the future.
2. Many theoretical and empirical research efforts have addressed the topics of how and why employees voluntarily decide to leave an organization. However, relatively less turnover research has focused specifically on how an employee decides to remain with an organization and what determines this attachment (c.f. Meyer & Allen, 1991; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). For instance, is there a different decision process to stay with an organization over a period of time or is it simply the absence of a quit decision? Attachment or retention processes should be studied along with quitting processes. These can be conceptualized as opposite ends of a continuum, from entrenched to ready-to-quit, suggesting that commitment and turnover research could be better integrated. An employee's current location on the attachment-withdrawal continuum could be a function of their standing on major psychological antecedent forces, see Figure 2.1.
3. Lee et al. (1996) departed from traditional methodologies by studying the quitting process using qualitative methods. We need to use more creative methods like these to investigate the many nuances and complexities of the decision. Qualitative methods should certainly be among them, but survival analysis on time-based hypotheses and competitive testing of structural equation models can also help to advance our knowledge.

In conclusion, there has been a great deal of progress in the area of voluntary turnover. However, many studies seem to have pursued their own research goals with little reference to what was required most to extend knowledge on voluntary turnover. It is hoped that this chapter has clarified the major subareas in voluntary turnover research and identified important issues for each, thereby providing direction for future research. If the area of voluntary turnover is to remain vital, future research must become more programmatic by concentrating on making incremental contributions that build systematically on past research.

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