THE CAUSAL ORDER OF JOB SATISFACTION AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT IN MODELS OF EMPLOYEE TURNOVER

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This study examines four possible models of the causal relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment in models of employee turnover: (1) satisfaction precedes commitment, (2) commitment precedes satisfaction, (3) satisfaction and commitment have a reciprocal relationship, and (4) satisfaction and commitment have no significant relationship. Structural equation models with two-wave panel data reveal no significant effects between satisfaction and commitment, and the overall fit for each of the four alternative models is virtually identical. Although analysis of the alternative models suggests the relationship between satisfaction and commitment may be spurious due to common determinants, alternative explanations for these results and conclusions for turnover research are discussed.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the causal relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment in models of employee turnover. Like much research on employee attitudes and behaviors in the workplace, researchers have proposed and tested various models of the process leading to employee turnover without actually establishing the causal order among two key determinants of turnover, satisfaction and commitment (Bluedorn, 1982; Dougherty, Bluedorn, & Keon, 1985; Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Kim, Price, Mueller, & Watson, 1996; Lee, Ashford, Walsh, & Mowday, 1992; Mobley, 1982; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Mueller, Boyer, Price, & Iverson, 1994; Price & Mueller, 1986a). Furthermore, demonstrating the causal order between determinants of turnover like satisfaction and commitment also requires specifying the indirect causal influences of other determinants of turnover. In addition to the employee orientations of satisfaction and commitment, models of employee turnover commonly specify various individual characteristics, workplace structures, and environmental conditions as deter-

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Human Resource Management Review,
Volume 9, Number 4, 1999, pages 495–524
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ISSN: 1053–4822

minants of turnover (Iverson & Roy, 1994; Kim, et al., 1996; Price & Mueller, 1986a). A dearth of explicit assumptions on the causal relationships among employee orientations like satisfaction and commitment, and among other presumed determinants of turnover, has limited our understanding of causal relationships in turnover research.

Furthermore, common limitations in research design of prior studies of the turnover process have prevented researchers from conducting appropriate analysis, and drawing precise conclusions, on the causal relationship between satisfaction and commitment. Despite the well-known limitations of cross-sectional data for studying causal relationships (Finkel, 1995; Menard, 1991), relatively few studies of the determinants of turnover like satisfaction, commitment, and intent to stay, have collected and analyzed longitudinal data. Researchers have typically used data collected from a sample of employees at one time point. Without incorporating a time element into the analysis of proposed models, existing studies have been unable to empirically demonstrate the causal ordering among satisfaction and commitment. Furthermore, the few longitudinal studies that have been conducted do not analyze a complete model of the determinants of turnover, risking serious model specification errors. As a result, researchers must base existing conclusions on the relationship between satisfaction and commitment in turnover models primarily on implicit assumptions about the influences of other determinants.

This study analyzes the causal relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment often proposed in models of the turnover process. Models frequently specify satisfaction and commitment as "intervening" variables between structural and individual determinants and turnover, yet the causal ordering between these two employee orientations has not been firmly established. This study contributes to our understanding of the turnover process by specifying more precise assumptions about the relationship between satisfaction, commitment, and other determinants in the model. While the emphasis in this study is on the causal relationship between satisfaction and commitment, this research also provides evidence on the causal impact of structural and individual determinants on these two employee orientations and, indirectly, on turnover. Furthermore, the analysis employs a two-wave panel design and structural equations modeling to analyze causal relationships in a model of turnover. Although these research methods cannot address all of the limitations of prior study designs, the methodology provides a significant enhancement to existing research on employee turnover.

THE CONCEPTS OF SATISFACTION, COMMITMENT, AND TURNOVER

The key conceptual distinction between satisfaction, commitment, and turnover is that the first two concepts are employee attitudes or "orientations," but turnover refers to an employee behavior. Job satisfaction is perhaps the most

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