COMMITMENT, CAREERS, AND RETENTION IN ORGANIZATIONS. (U)

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**Commitment, Careers, and Retention in Organizations: A Final Report**

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**Abstract:**
This final report summarizes the work carried out under ONR Contract No. N00014-76-C-0164, NR 170-812.
Commitment, Careers, and Retention in Organizations: A Final Report

This report represents the final report for ONR Contract No. 00014-76-C-0164, NR 170-812, entitled "Commitment, Careers, and Retention in Organizations." This contract covered the period from October 1, 1975 to October 1, 1980 and was managed by Richard M. Steers, Richard T. Mowday, and Lyman W. Porter. Eugene F. Stone also served as a subcontractor for two of the five years.

The major purpose of the project was to carry out research designed to examine the complex interrelationships which exist among employee career patterns, commitment and attachment to organizations, and subsequent employee turnover and absenteeism. The major thrust of the project has been to develop empirically based theoretical models of employee attachment processes. This thrust can be seen in several major areas.

To begin with, we have continued development and validation of a measure of employee commitment to organizations. This instrument has been used to carry out several studies relating to both the antecedents and outcomes of organizational commitment. Based on this research, a model of commitment is being proposed as part of a new book to be published by Academic Press.

In addition, recent work has also involved an extensive review of the empirical research on employee absenteeism in organizations. Based on this work, a process model of employee absenteeism has been proposed which attempts to identify the major influences on this behavior.

Finally, research has been carried out investigating various aspects of employee turnover. Most recently, attention has been focused on developing an
understanding of the psychological processes by which individuals and organizations accommodate the decision to participate or withdraw. A model of this process has been suggested for future testing and refinement.

The major findings of the various studies conducted under this contract have been reported both in various research journals and in various papers presented at professional meetings by the principal investigators. Moreover, three symposia were conducted at professional meetings to consider the topic more fully. As noted above, a book is currently being completed that will attempt to summarize and integrate the various findings in an orderly fashion. Hence, it would be somewhat redundant to attempt a major summary here. Instead, we have listed below the various published sources of our work and the reader is referred to these documents for such information. All such documents are available from the authors.

ONR Technical Reports Issued

During the period covered by the project, twenty-two Technical Reports were issued. These are listed below with accompanying abstracts.


This paper reviews 17 multivariate models of organizational effectiveness in terms of their primary evaluation criteria, their normative or descriptive nature, their generalizability, and their derivation. Little consistency was found in the evaluation criteria of the models. Eight problems of such models are discussed which appear to reduce their utility for the study of organizational effectiveness. Suggestions are advanced for future work to focus on operative goals and goal optimization to further our understanding of the effectiveness construct in on-going organizations.

This study examines the antecedents and outcomes of organizational commitment within a cross-validational framework. The study was carried out among 382 hospital employees and 119 R&D scientists and engineers. It was found that major influences on commitment arise from personal, job, and organizational characteristics for both samples. Moreover, commitment was found to be strongly related to intent and desire to remain for both samples and moderately related to attendance and job performance for one sample. A model of organizational commitment is proposed and evaluated in the light of these data. Results are compared with earlier findings and implications for future research are discussed.


This study sought to: 1) compare the relative predictive powers of job attachment and job satisfaction with respect to turnover among a sample of public employees; and 2) compare the relative influences on both attitudes of individual and job characteristics. It was found that attachment was a more effective predictor of turnover than satisfaction, even when the alternative attitude was partialled out. In addition, it was found that individual employee characteristics were more strongly related to attachment than were job characteristics, while the opposite was found for satisfaction. The findings are discussed in the light of previous evidence and implications are drawn for the practice of management.


This study examined selected aspects of the exercise of influence in educational organizations. Power motivation, characteristics of the exercise of influence and influence effectiveness were studied. A sample of elementary school principals indicated their perceptions and behavioral intentions relevant to the exercise of upward influence in several common decision situations. The results of the study suggest that principals who were rated high in influence activity can be characterized by both high instrumental and intrinsic power motivation, as well as high self-perceptions of power. Several situational factors surrounding the exercise of influence were found to be related to choices among alternative influence targets and the likelihood of using various methods of influence. The likelihood of using "manipulation" as a method of influence was found to most consistently differentiate between principals rated high and low in effectiveness, with high effectiveness principals indicating they were more likely to use this method.

Questionnaire data on job characteristics, personality traits, and job satisfaction were obtained from 340 employees of a manufacturing organization. Moderated regression analyses were performed to determine the extent to which three personality traits (Achievement, Autonomy, and Endurance) moderated the relationship between job scope and satisfaction with the work itself. Results showed that only the Achievement variable had statistically significant moderating effects. The practical significance of this effect was, however, negligible.


This study examines the effects of feedback on job attitudes and work behavior among a sample of female sewing machine operators. Increased feedback led to significant improvements in the group cohesion and goal commitment of the operators. Moreover, marked improvements in product quality were associated with feedback from management. Turnover and absenteeism also decreased, but overall satisfaction did not increase and intrinsic job satisfaction actually decreased. Operator work expectations increased as a result of their involvement in this field experiment. Findings are discussed with reference to theoretical and practical issues in work systems redesign.


Although job enrichment has become a popular strategy for improving the quality of working life, there is an absence of a clear understanding of how jobs influence the level of employee motivation. What appears to be needed is a conceptual model which can both guide research and provide the practitioner with greater insight into the motivational implications of changes in the nature of jobs. This paper reviews six conceptual models of the motivational properties of tasks which have been presented recently in the literature. Each model is examined in terms of its scope and specificity in explaining motivational processes associated with task design. Following this examination, specific suggestions are offered for future research aimed at improving the utility of such models to both investigators and managers.

This study examined the influence of job scope on the relationship between selected personality characteristics of employees and turnover. Individuals employed as machine operators (low scope jobs) and scientific and technical personnel (high scope jobs) were sampled within a large manufacturing organization. No direct relationships were found between personality characteristics and turnover for the combined samples of employees on high and low scope jobs. When correlational analyses were carried out within job scope samples, however, turnover was found to be negatively related to the need for achievement and positively related to the need for affiliation for employees on high scope jobs. In addition, the need for affiliation was negatively related to turnover for the low job scope sample. When the results for the two samples were compared, the correlations between turnover and the needs for achievement and affiliation found among employees on high and low scope jobs were significantly different. The implications of these findings for organizations and future research on turnover were discussed.


The purpose of this study was to examine relationships between employee characteristics and turnover in organizations. N=314 female clerical employees in two regional offices of a large insurance company were administered Jackson's (1967) Personality Research Form and a questionnaire that included measures of several demographic characteristics. Turnover data were collected up to eight months following the questionnaire administration. Multivariate relationships were found between employee characteristics and turnover in both samples. Compared with stayers, leavers in both offices were characterized by lower tenure in the company, a higher need for autonomy and a lower need for harm-avoidance. Mixed support was found for the relationship between turnover and "extreme" personality characteristics hypothesized by Porter and Steers (1973). Several suggestions were made concerning the direction of future research on turnover.


This study examines the effects of job scope and need for achievement on managerial commitment and performance. It was hypothesized that high scope jobs would be associated with increased organizational commitment irrespective of n Achievement. Moreover, it was hypothesized that high scope jobs would be related to increased performance only
for high n Ach subjects and not for low n Ach subjects. Results supported both hypotheses. The findings are discussed as they related to other investigations and it is suggested that the n Ach construct offers considerable utility in future job scope research.

11. Stone, E. G. "Some Personality Correlates of Perceptions of and Reactions to Task Characteristics."

The degree to which individual differences variables influence perceptions of and reactions to task characteristics was examined in the present study. Subjects (N=46) were administered Jackson's (1967) Personality Research Form and the Group Embedded Figures Test of Witkin et al. (1971) in group administration sessions. They then performed an assembly task in a laboratory setting and completed measures of: (a) perceived task characteristics, and (b) immediate and projected task satisfaction. Correlational analyses showed that both perceptions of and reactions to task characteristics were influenced by the measured individual differences variables. The study's findings were related to previous theory and research on task design.


This study investigated relationships between characteristics of individuals exerting upward influence in organizations and the methods of influence they were likely to use. A sample of elementary school principals indicated the likelihood of using five methods of influence in three organizational decision situations. Methods of influence were examined in relation to the principal's years of supervisory experience, self-confidence (i.e., perceived probability of successfully exerting influence), need for achievement, need for power and ratings of actual power. Consistent relationships were found between several methods of influence and the principal's years of supervisory experience and needs for achievement and power. No relationships were found between the methods and measures of actual power or self-confidence. Directions for future research on the exercise of power in organizations were discussed.

13. Rhodes, S. R., and Steers, R. M. "Summary Tables of Studies of Employee Absenteeism." This report was intended to serve as a reference document and was not submitted for publication.

This report summarizes in tabular form the results of 104 empirical studies of employee absenteeism. Summary information is provided for each study, including: 1) the specific factor under study; 2) the investigators; 3) the nature of the sample; 4) the sample size; 5)
whether the study was a group or individual design; 6) the types of absence measures used; and 7) the findings. Study findings are further categorized by factor. The summary tables are intended to serve as a reference document. It is hoped that the availability of this document will facilitate more integrative research on the subject of employee absenteeism.


Based on a review of 104 empirical studies, this paper presents a model of employee attendance in work organizations. It is suggested, based on the literature, that attendance is directly influenced by two primary factors: a) attendance motivation; and b) ability to come to work. Attendance motivation, in turn, is largely influenced by: a) satisfaction with the job situation; and b) various internal and external pressures to attend. The model attempts to account for both voluntary and involuntary absenteeism. Moreover, the model argues against earlier assertions that absenteeism is principally caused by job dissatisfaction and that absenteeism and turnover share common roots. Available literature is largely consistent with the model but not sufficient to validate it. Hence, the model is proposed here to stimulate and guide further systematic efforts to study attendance behavior.


This paper summarizes a stream of research aimed at developing and validating a measure of employee commitment to work organizations. The instrument, developed by Porter and his colleagues, is called the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). Based on a series of studies among 2,563 employees in nine divergent organizations, satisfactory test-retest reliabilities and internal consistency reliabilities were found. In addition, cross-validated evidence of acceptable levels of predictive, convergent, and discriminant validity emerged for the instrument. Norms for males and females are presented based on the available sample. Possible instrument limitations and future research needs on the measurement and study of organizational commitment are reviewed.

The impact of organization structure on perceptions of role conflict and ambiguity was examined within a multivariate framework and found to explain substantial portions of variation in both role perceptions. These structural influences were generally supported across three occupational groupings: professional employees (N=55); secretarial/clerical employees (N=127); and blue collar employees (N=70) within one public organization. Minor differences were noted between occupational groupings with respect to which structural properties were more influential in determining role perceptions.


This study examines the effects of experimentally introducing a participative goal-setting program aimed at reducing employee turnover in fifty branches of a West Coast bank. One half of the branches received the goal-setting treatment (focusing on employee development goals), while the matched control groups received no treatment. Results showed that, for those branches that implemented the goals, turnover was reduced significantly compared to the matched control groups. Moreover, the extent to which the goals were actually implemented was found to be influenced by the efficiency level of the individual branches. Results are discussed in the light of relevant goal-setting and turnover literature.


Relationships of several aspects of organization structure with organizational commitment were examined within a multiple correlation framework for 262 public sector employees. As a set, the six structural variables accounted for over 20% of the variation in organizational commitment for the vocationally heterogeneous sample studied. Decentralization, functional dependence, and formalization each made significant (p < .05), independent contributions to explained variation in organizational commitment. Overall, these results suggest that future model-building efforts should take organization structure into account as one potentially important dimension of influences on organizational commitment.

Based on a sample of worker-owners in a producer cooperative and employees in a conventional organization, this study empirically tests portions of a theoretical model explaining the relationship between worker ownership and control and work attitudes and behaviors. According to the model, worker-owners in the cooperative are hypothesized to have higher perceptions of participation in decision-making, pay equity, performance-reward contingencies, and group work norms than are employees in the conventional organization. These perceptions, in turn, are expected to lead to an increased commitment to the organization and lower levels of absenteeism, tardiness, accidents, grievances and turnover. Results partially support the model with members of the cooperative being more committed to their organization, while at the same time having higher absenteeism and tardiness levels than employees in the conventional firm. Implications of results are presented, and directions for future research are discussed.


The work environment faced by the modern manager is multi-faceted, having at a minimum socio-normative, economic and technological aspects. Through analysis of current trends toward change in the nature of this complex environment, it appears feasible to build a scenario for the last quarter of the 20th century. A potentially critical problem that will face organizations during that quarter-century will be that of gaining and maintaining sufficiently sturdy linkages of managers to their organizations. Several predictable changes in the work environment will tend to undermine what are now believed to be the antecedents to organizational attachment. This paper discusses the forces that appear to bind managers psychologically to their organizations, in the context of projected environmental changes, and develops a set of propositions that could guide organizational action and research dealing with these issues.


This paper examined the relative influence of personal factors and perceived work experiences on employee turnover and absenteeism among a sample of 200 clerical and service workers in a major hospital. It was found that turnover and absenteeism represent largely independent behaviors. Moreover, although personal factors predicted absenteeism better than perceived work experiences, no clear predictive trends were found for turnover. Results are discussed as they relate to theory and previous research.

Based on a review of existing research on employee turnover, this paper suggests a comprehensive model of the processes leading up to voluntary employee termination. The model includes several factors found in research but not heretofore included in previous turnover models. Following this, the paper focuses on the psychological and behavioral mechanisms used by employees to accommodate the decision to stay or leave once this decision has been made. Drawing heavily on attribution theory, a variety of post-decision accommodation processes are suggested. Finally, suggestions for future research are identified to guide additional work in the area.

Other Recent Related Publications

The principal investigators also published the following additional papers and books. This material was not originally published in Technical Report form.


Paper Presented Relating to ONR Research

In addition to the Technical Reports, the Principal Investigators have delivered forty-five papers at professional meetings or at the invitation of various universities. These papers reviewed various aspects of research carried out with the support of ONR.


Steers, R. M. "Major Influences on Organizational Effectiveness." Visiting Distinguished Speaker, University of Utah, November 1977.

Steers, R. M. "Employee Commitment and Organizational Effectiveness." Invited speaker, University of Washington, November 1978.


Steers, R. M. "Organizational Commitment and Employee Turnover." Invited speaker, Faculty of Commerce and Business Administration, University of British Columbia, February 1979.

Steers, R. M. "Attachment to Organizations." Invited speaker, Department of Psychology, University of Oregon, March 1979.

Steers, R. M. "New Directions in Research on Employee Commitment and Turnover." Invited speaker, University of South Carolina, April 1979.

Steers, R. M. "Employee Commitment to Organizations." Invited speaker, Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, New Jersey, April 1979.


Symposia Organized on Topic by Principal Investigators

Finally, the principal investigators have been responsible for organizing several symposia to expand discussion and dialogue on various aspects of the employee attachment process, as well as other related topics. This does not include symposia organized by others in which the principal investigators participated.


In closing, we wish to thank the Office of Naval Research for its support of these research efforts. In particular, we wish to acknowledge Drs. Bert T. King and David Stonner of the Organizational Effectiveness Research Program at ONR for their continued support and encouragement. It is hoped that the findings resulting from the various studies funded by this contract will serve to advance our knowledge concerning the processes by which people become attached to or withdraw from work organizations.
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