

Turnover Intentions of Ohio Cooperative Extension County Agents

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One of the greatest managerial concerns in any organization is the voluntary turnover among employees. Turnover is defined as the cessation of participation in a particular job in an organization by an individual who received monetary compensation from the organization (Jackofsky & Peters, 1983; Mobley, 1982).

In Ohio during the 1979 through 1984 time period, 65 Ohio Cooperative Extension Service county field faculty, half of whom had been classified as high performers, voluntarily left their positions. Voluntary turnover of county extension agents in Ohio caused vacancies that, in some cases, were not filled because of reduced or frozen budgets and/or lack of qualified candidates. Even when empty positions were filled, the process was very time-consuming and expensive (Cunningham, 1984). Cascio (1982) reported that managerial time involved in recruitment, screening, selection, classification and training represented a substantial investment to the organization. All the costs associated with replacement would be magnified when the leaver was a highly valued employee, as was the case with high performers.

Educational organizations like the Cooperative Extension Service need to be aware of the factors associated with voluntary turnover, for when any staff member quits, both the organization and individual may suffer (Clark, 1981). The disruption of service to clientele, the extra time and money spent on recruitment and training of the replacement, and the added stress of more work for the remaining staff during the interim were just three possible consequences suffered by the organization when turnover occurred. From the perspective of the individual, leaving a job may have caused temporary loss of income and benefits, family stress, problems with individual self-esteem, and possibly sustained unemployment and relocation for the individual and family (Mobley, 1982).

In an attempt to understand the phenomenon of employee turnover, many models of individual turnover have been developed and empirically tested. Early research indicated that turnover appeared to be an individual choice based on two main factors: perceived desirability of movement from a job (most often measured in terms of job satisfaction) and perceived ease of movement from a job (most often referred to as job alternatives and the attractiveness and attainability of those alternatives) (March & Simon, 1958). Other factors investigated that have appeared to be associated with turnover included age, tenure in the job, environmental factors and economic trends.

Much of the literature on turnover has been based on the original March and Simon Two Factor Theory of Turnover (Mobley, 1977; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979; Price, 1977; Steers & Mowday, 1981). However, in response to the continued demand to investigate turnover as it occurred in different populations of performers, the most recent turnover research has attempted to include job performance and related factors in the investigation of turnover (Dreher, 1982; Jackofsky, 1984; Jackofsky & Peters, 1983; Keller, 1984; Martin, Price, & Mueller, 1981). One recent model (Jackofsky, 1984) which addressed job performance level as an important independent variable served as a basis for the development of the theory and model of this study.

Purpose and Objectives

The primary purpose of the study was to determine the role that various factors played in the formation of intentions of Ohio Cooperative Extension Service county agents to leave the job, particularly the factor "job performance level" as measured by supervisor rating and self-rating techniques.

The independent variables of interest were categorized into five groupings: (a) perceived desirability of staying variables (six job satisfaction variables); (b) perceived ease of movement; (c) perceived job performance variables (supervisor rating and self-rating); (d) perceived job performance-reward contingency variables (extrinsic and intrinsic); and (e) demographic variables (age, tenure and the job, major program responsibility area). The dependent variable was intention to leave the job, a measure that had been suggested to be the immediate precursor to, and best predictor of, voluntary turnover (Miller, Katerberg, & Hullin, 1979; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979).

The specific objectives of the study included: (a) describe the levels of the independent and dependent variables among Ohio Cooperative Extension Service county agents; (b) determine the best predictor(s) of the dependent variable, intention to leave the job; and (c) determine the nature and strength of various relationships between independent variables and between selected independent variables and the dependent variable.

Procedures

Population

The population consisted of all Ohio Cooperative Extension Service county agents under contract March 1, 1985. Names were obtained from a validated list secured from the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service. The validation process controlled for selection and frame error. The population included agriculture agents ($n = 94$), home economics agents ($n = 80$) and 4-H youth agents ($n = 70$). The total population for the study was 244.

The entire population was used in the study (controlling sampling error) and was referred to as a sample of all populations of Ohio Cooperative Extension Service county agents who might have been employed by the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service at other points in time. This logic permitted the use of inferential statistics in the data analysis.

Data Collection

Two methods of data collection were used: a mail questionnaire and personnel files of the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service. The total number of respondents was 229 for an accepting sample of 94%. Data for 218 agents were usable for a data sample of 89%. Generalizability of the results of the study was determined by comparing early respondents with late respondents on selected variables ($\alpha = .05$) using t tests. No differences were found; using the logic that late respondents are most like non-respondents (Miller & Smith, 1983), results could be generalized to the entire population.

Instrumentation

Data for all variables except supervisor rating of job performance were obtained by a mail questionnaire developed by the researcher. Supervisor rating of job performance utilized the 1984 Performance

Against Standards score obtained from personnel files of the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service.

The mail questionnaire contained three sections: (a) Likert-type items scaled very strongly disagree = 1 to very strongly agree = 6; (b) demographic information; and (c) the Job Descriptive Index (Smith, Kendall, & Hullin, 1969) measuring five facets of job satisfaction.

Content validity was determined using a panel of experts. A reliability pilot-test using Ohio Cooperative Extension Service district personnel produced Cronbach's alphas ranging from .70 to .94.

Results

Objective One

Data for Objective One appear in Table 1. Ohio Cooperative Extension Service county agents generally had low intentions to leave their present jobs. The mean score was 2.13 (strongly disagree) with 93% of the scores on the dependent variable falling into the disagreement categories.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Independent and Dependent Variables Among Ohio Cooperative Extension Service County Agents

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Scale
Age	40.0 years	9.7 years	
Tenure in the job	9.3 years	6.7 years	
Supervisor rating of job performance	9.24	.848	1 to 12
Self-rating of job performance	4.73	.406	1 to 6
Extrinsic reward contingency	3.65	.733	1 to 6
Intrinsic reward contingency	4.73	.674	1 to 6
Perceived ease of movement	4.23	.607	1 to 6
Overall job satisfaction	4.42	.764	1 to 6
Satisfaction with promotion	10.96	7.18	0 to 27
Satisfaction with pay	15.26	5.40	0 to 27
Satisfaction with the work itself	39.95	5.70	0 to 54
Satisfaction with co-workers	44.37	9.94	0 to 54
Satisfaction with supervision	41.46	10.72	0 to 54
Intention to leave the job	2.13	1.02	1 to 6

Respondents reported moderate amounts of most of the perceived desirability of staying variables with the mean score for overall job satisfaction in the Agree category (4.42) with less than 10% of the agents in disagreement. Ranking the mean scores for the other perceived desirability of staying variables from low to high produced the following results: (a) satisfaction with promotion (LOWEST); (b) satisfaction with pay; (c) satisfaction with the work itself; (d) satisfaction with supervision; and (e) satisfaction with co-workers (HIGHEST). Perceptions of ease of movement were fairly high with a mean of 4.23 (Agree) for the respondents, and only 7% fell into disagreement categories.

Agents tended to reward themselves intrinsically for good performance with 97% in agreement with the job performance-intrinsic reward contingency. A mean score of 4.73 for that variable is described as Strongly Agree, one of the highest mean scores found in the study. In contrast to that finding, however, was the lack of agreement with the job performance-extrinsic reward contingency. The mean score for that variable was 3.65. Over 40% of all respondents disagreed with the performance-extrinsic reward contingency.

Scores for self-reports of job performance all fell into the agreement categories except for one individual. The mean score for self-rating of job performance was 4.73 (Strongly Agree), and over 68% of the agents strongly agreed or very strongly agreed. Supervisor rating of job performance produced an average score of 9.24 on a scale of 1 to 12, with 1 being low and 12 being high. Scores ranged from 6.7 to 11.4. Forty-five percent of the agents received a score between 9.0 and 10.0.

The average respondent was 40 years old and had remained in the present job for 9.3 years. Respondents were quite evenly divided among the three program responsibility areas (Agriculture = 38%, Home Economics = 33%, 4-H Youth = 29%).

Objective Two

To determine the best predictor(s) of the dependent variable, a stepwise multiple regression technique was used. Variables were entered into the regression equation according to the strength of the relationship with the dependent variable. A significance level of .05 was used for entry into and removal from the model.

Table 2

Stepwise Multiple Regression of Intention to Leave the Job on Job Satisfaction, Age, Satisfaction With Co-Workers and Job Performance

Independent Variables Entered Stepwise in In Equation	Multiple R	R ²	R ² Increment	df	F
Overall job satisfaction	.460	.212	.212	(1,216)	58.07*
Age	.484	.235	.023	(1,215)	6.43*
Satisfaction with co-workers	.515	.265	.030	(1,214)	8.79*
Self-rating of job performance	.539	.291	.026	(1,213)	7.72*

*p<.05, F_{crit} 3.89.

The set of best predictors, as shown in Table 2, included overall job satisfaction, age, satisfaction with co-workers, and self-rating of job performance. Total variance in the dependent variable accounted for by this set was 29% (R² = .291). Overall job satisfaction was determined to be the single best predictor, accounting for 21% of the variance in the dependent variable. A regression model containing all independent variables increased the amount of variance accounted for by only four percent (R² = .333).

Objective Three

The original theory suggested that both perceived desirability of staying (job satisfaction) and perceived ease of movement would be related to and have a direct effect upon the dependent variable. Additionally, the suggestion was that the two variables would be considered simultaneously by the individual and that they would interact to affect the dependent variable.

Low to moderate negative relationships were found between intention to leave the job and the perceived desirability of staying variables. A low, negative relationship was found (Table 3) between perceived ease of movement and intention to leave the job ($r = -.18$). In addition, some interactions were found between certain job satisfaction variables and perceived ease of movement. These interactions were determined by testing differences between variance increments produced using full and partial regression models containing perceived ease of movement and either (a) overall job satisfaction, (b) satisfaction with promotion, or (c) satisfaction with pay along with appropriate interaction terms.

There was a negligible positive relationship between both age and tenure in the job and the dependent variable. A moderate positive relationship was found between self-rating of job performance and perceived ease of movement ($r = .34$). However, supervisor rating of job performance was not found to be related to age nor to tenure in the job, relationships which were expected. There was a low positive relationship ($r = .29$) between the measures of job performance. This correlation indicated that about 8% of the variance in the variable was accounted for by the relationship between the two.

Results of ANOVAs showed significant differences were found between major program responsibility areas on three perceived desirability of staying variables: overall job satisfaction, satisfaction with pay, and satisfaction with the work itself. On all three variables, 4-H youth agents scored significantly lower than did agriculture and home economics agents.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Ohio Cooperative Extension Service county agents had fairly low intentions to leave the job. Most agents experienced moderate to high levels of job satisfaction and agreed that it would be easy to move to another position. Lower amounts of satisfaction were associated with the extrinsic rewards of pay and promotion and higher amounts of satisfaction were associated with co-workers, supervision, and the work itself. Two measures of satisfaction were included in the set of best predictors of intention to leave the job: (a) overall job satisfaction and (b) satisfaction with co-workers. These findings indicate that organizations struggling with turnover should pay attention to levels of job satisfaction and make an attempt to adjust these levels as appropriate.

Agents tended to reward themselves intrinsically for good performance but did not see that the rewards given to them by the organization were necessarily contingent upon their levels of performance. Thus, organizations should make rewards given to employees contingent upon job performance so that high performers are rewarded more than low performers. Rewards can include pay, promotion, formal recognition and improved environmental conditions.

Relationships between independent variables and intention to leave the job suggest that organizations need to be aware of the attitudes,

Table 3
Pearson Correlation Coefficient for the Relationships Between Variables Among Ohio Cooperative Extension Service
 County Agents

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	1.00													
2	.042 p=.539	1.00												
3	.35 p=.000	.113 p=.095	1.00											
4	.339 p=.000	-.113 p=.097	.304 p=.000	1.00										
5	-.264 p=.000	-.248 p=.000	-.295 p=.000	-.184 p=.006	1.00									
6	.261 p=.000	.356 p=.000	.502 p=.000	.104 p=.125	-.460 p=.000	1.00								
7	-.005 p=.945	.096 p=.160	-.035 p=.608	-.099 p=.142	.045 p=.509	.062 p=.362	1.00							

(table continues)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
8	.093 p=.171	.212 p=.001	.106 p=.119	-.111 p=.102	.040 p=.552	.232 p=.000	.464 p=.000	1.00						
9	-.087 p=.202	.523 p=.000	.043 p=.527	-.024 p=.722	-.078 p=.252	.215 p=.001	.096 p=.159	.112 p=.099	1.00					
10	-.108 p=.110	.542 p=.000	.045 p=.509	-.122 p=.072	-.160 p=.018	.324 p=.000	.084 p=.215	.210 p=.002	.281 p=.000	1.00				
11	.104 p=.125	.355 p=.000	.297 p=.000	.050 p=.463	-.214 p=.002	.490 p=.000	.137 p=.044	.335 p=.000	.253 p=.000	.258 p=.000	1.00			
12	.037 p=.589	.357 p=.000	.039 p=.566	-.067 p=.327	-.241 p=.000	.230 p=.000	.098 p=.149	.246 p=.000	.307 p=.000	.216 p=.001	.265 p=.000	1.00		
13	-.049 p=.470	.482 p=.000	.140 p=.039	-.039 p=.564	-.149 p=.028	.239 p=.000	.062 p=.367	.149 p=.208	.349 p=.000	.266 p=.000	.264 p=.000	.281 p=.000	1.00	
14	.286 p=.000	.233 p=.000	.047 p=.486	.036 p=.602	-.183 p=.007	.112 p=.009	.078 p=.249	.000 p=.996	.083 p=.222	.123 p=.071	.025 p=.712	-.037 p=.590	.117 p=.084	1.00

1--Self rating of job performance; 2--Perceived job performance-extrinsic reward contingency; 3--Perceived job performance-intrinsic reward contingency; 4--Perceived ease of movement; 5--Intention to leave the job; 6--Overall job satisfaction; 7--Tenure in the job; 8--Age; 9--Satisfaction with promotion; 10--Satisfaction with pay; 11--Satisfaction with the work itself; 12--Satisfaction with co-workers; 13--Satisfaction with supervision; 14--Supervisor rating of job performance.

perceptions and intentions of employees. Level of job satisfaction, performance perceptions, feelings of fairness and rewards, satisfaction with specific parts of the job, and intentions to leave can all have implications for management policies.

4-H youth agents experienced lower levels of overall job satisfaction, satisfaction with pay, and satisfaction with work itself, suggesting that a serious look should be taken at why this group of agents is different from the others and develop possible courses of corrective action.

The strength of the relationship between supervisor rating of job performance and self-rating of job performance was very low, identifying a need for better communication between supervision and staff. Employees could be made aware of organizational perceptions of job performance level through the use of an improved counseling/feedback system included in the performance appraisal process.

The empirical and statistical model presented is appropriate for other populations including vocational educators and could be adapted and tested with such populations.

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(Gamon & Burton--Continued from page 6)

Vocational agriculture teachers who attended the fruit/vegetable inservice workshop and those who did not participate in the inservice activity were similar for nearly all of the other characteristics that were measured (Table 3). They taught in similar facilities, had comparable years of experience, had similar educational backgrounds in horticulture, and numbers of students in the program were similar. Additional research is needed on differences between instructors who attend inservice activities and those who do not. A study is needed on reasons for non-attendance at inservice activities and alternative strategies for reaching those who chose not to attend.

It would appear that participation/nonparticipation by teachers in the fruit/vegetable inservice workshop was related to implementation of fruit and vegetable units in vocational agriculture programs. Additional inservice activities are recommended as teachers and university personnel orchestrate implementation of fruit/vegetable units into local programs of study. Results from this follow-up evaluation indicate that inservice activities can make a difference.

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