

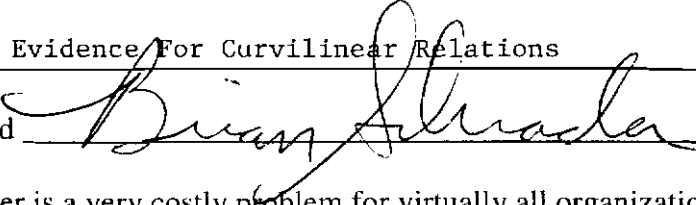
AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Employee Tenure, Performance Level, and Turnover:

Field Study Evidence For Curvilinear Relations

Abstract approved 

Employee turnover is a very costly problem for virtually all organizations within the United States. Employee turnover can be classified as either voluntary or involuntary from the employee's perspective. Voluntary turnover is when employees voluntarily makes the decision to depart from their position at an organization (e.g., quitting). Involuntary turnover is when employees are involuntarily forced to leave their position with an organization (e.g., being fired). Over the years, researchers have studied the relationship among several employee characteristics and both types of turnover. Two such characteristics are employee tenure and employee job performance. However, research has yielded inconsistent findings. While no studies have investigated the possibility of a curvilinear relationship between employee tenure and turnover, Jackofsky (1984) proposed a set of hypotheses. However, only limited research has tested and supported these hypotheses. Thus, the present study investigated the possibility of whether employee tenure, performance level, and both voluntary and involuntary turnover were curvilinearly related by assessing data over an eight-year period. Archival organizational records of 362 nursing home employees spanning the years 1988 through 1996 were evaluated. Additionally, 91 records included performance scores of showed limited support for evidence of a

curvilinear relationship between employee tenure and turnover. However, strong support was found for Jackofsky's (1984) curvilinear hypothesis between employee performance level and turnover. Although only limited support was found for a curvilinear relationship between employee tenure and turnover, future studies should continue to investigate this relationship utilizing longer time frames of data collection. Furthermore, organizations should be cognizant of the possibility that both good and poor performers may be equally likely to voluntarily depart from the organization.

EMPLOYEE TENURE, PERFORMANCE LEVEL, AND TURNOVER:
FIELD STUDY EVIDENCE FOR CURVILINEAR RELATIONS

Thesis Proposal

Presented to

The Division of Psychology and Special Education

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements of the Degree

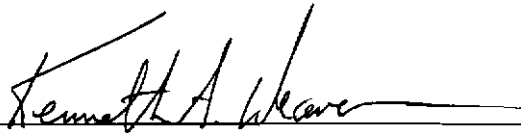
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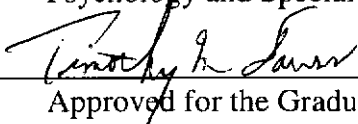
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When employees make the decision to abruptly quit their position with an organization, that organization invariably faces several problems. Perhaps the most critical of these problems is monetary. For example, when an employee quits, the organization will certainly have to cover the high costs associated with the selection and training of a new employee. Moreover, the productivity of the organization may suffer due to mistakes made by the new employee during the initial training stage. There would be similar concerns if an organization has to terminate (i.e., fire) an employee. That is, even if the employee is terminated due to counter-productive activities such as poor performance, theft, or insubordination, the organization will still have a cost of selecting and training a new employee.

Employee turnover is a phenomenon that affects virtually every industry within the United States. Traditionally, the severity of annual turnover rates often varies according to the type of occupation being considered. For example, administrative positions average around a 12% annual turnover rate per year, while sales and unskilled positions average around a 24% annual turnover rate per year (Oliver, 1998). However some industries, such as nursing homes, can suffer from turnover rates as high as 100% annually (Harrington, 1991).

These problems associated with employee turnover have generated a voluminous amount of turnover literature. Indeed, over 1000 studies of turnover have turned up during this century (Hom, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992). Over the years, researchers have developed categories that view employee turnover as voluntary (i.e., quitting) or involuntary (i.e., being terminated) from the employee's perspective, as well as functional

or dysfunctional from the organization's perspective (e.g., Dalton, Krackhardt, & Porter, 1981). Since this time, a substantial amount of turnover research has focused on the characteristics of those who leave (e.g., Healy, Lehman, & McDaniel, 1995; Wells & Muchinsky, 1985).

For example, two employee characteristics studied in turnover research are employee tenure (Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1994) and employee job performance (Williams & Livingstone, 1994). Although these two antecedents are related to turnover (Barrick & Mount, 1994; McEvoy & Cascio, 1987), there have been recent concerns that this line of research has not truly added to the understanding of the turnover construct (Somers, 1996). As such, the present author argues that research investigating the antecedents of employee turnover utilize research designs capable of detecting patterns of the relationships between employee characteristics and organizational turnover over time (i.e., longitudinal designs).

Distinguishing Between Voluntary and Involuntary Turnover

For many years, the traditional turnover taxonomy has assumed that employees leave organizations for either voluntary or involuntary reasons (Price, 1977). This focus on turnover taxonomy represents the viewpoint that turnover is an individual choice behavior and was evident in early reviews of turnover (Brayfield & Crockett, 1955; Campion, 1991). This view simply sees turnover through the employee perspective. For example, voluntary turnover occurs when the employees "voluntarily" leave the organization (i.e., quit), while involuntary turnover occurs when the employees "involuntarily" lose their jobs (i.e., is terminated).

Researchers of the turnover field have also recognized that turnover may be viewed from the organization's perspective (e.g., Dalton & Tudor, 1979; Mobley, 1982).

This viewpoint developed in response when researchers realized such a perspective provides them with a more clearly defined criterion of turnover, which, subsequently, may assist these researchers in the understanding of this construct to a greater degree. Moreover, such information may lend assistance to organizations by allowing them to monitor the reasons why employees are quitting (Abelson, 1987). For example, Abelson presents an expanded taxonomy of turnover that classifies turnover as avoidable or unavoidable.

As Stumpf and Dawley (1981) point out, the organization may be able to control voluntary turnover if the reason is considered potentially avoidable. For example, an employee who quits due to "not liking the wage rate" will be classified under this taxonomy as avoidable/voluntary, while an employee who quits the organization due to "deciding to return to school" will be classified as unavoidable/voluntary under this taxonomy. Researchers using this turnover taxonomy may assist in informing organizations which type of turnover is controllable and which is not. Thus, organizations can monitor their patterns of voluntary and involuntary turnover to potentially identify, as well as rectify, problem areas they may be able to control (e.g., wage rate).

Abelson's (1987) expanded taxonomy consists of the categories termed avoidable/voluntary, unavoidable/voluntary, avoidable/involuntary, and unavoidable/involuntary. Employees who voluntarily leave an organization due to such reasons as "better pay elsewhere," "better working conditions elsewhere," "problem with leadership/administration," and "better organization to work for elsewhere" would be classified as avoidable/voluntary. Employees who voluntarily leave an organization due to such reasons as "moved to another location due to spouse," "mid-career change,"

"want to stay home to care for spouse/children," or "became pregnant" would be classified as unavoidable/voluntary. Finally, avoidable/involuntary reasons would include "dismissed/terminated," "laid-off," or "forced retirement," while unavoidable/involuntary reasons would include "problematic health conditions" and "death."

Tenure and Turnover

Previous research models (e.g., Bannister & Giffeth, 1986; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979) developed to focus on employee characteristics have proposed that individual difference characteristics (i.e., demographics) influence employees' affective responses such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. One such demographic variable is the length of time an employee has worked for an organization (i.e., employee tenure). Certainly, the tenure of an individual has been found to play a significant role in models of job performance (Price, 1977; Schmidt, Hunter, & Outerbridge, 1986).

Research investigating the predictors of employee turnover has largely focused on the investigation of behavioral antecedents (e.g., job performance and organizational commitment), but relatively few research studies have focused on employee tenure. It is argued that the importance of this variable should not be minimized for three reasons. First, as stated above, relatively few studies have examined employee tenure within this line of turnover research. In recent years, researchers have become increasingly concerned with other behavioral antecedents (i.e., job performance), as well as their relationship with turnover. Secondly, the few research studies that have investigated this variable have demonstrated inconsistencies concerning the magnitude and direction of the relationship with involuntary and voluntary turnover. For example,

LaRocco, Puch, and Gunderson (1977) used 642 naval personnel and found that those with longer job tenure were less likely to be involuntary leavers ($d = -.47, p < .05$). Furthermore, Stumpf and Dawley (1981) found that tenure was inversely related to involuntary turnover among bank tellers ($d = .72, p < .05$).

However, Barrick, Mount, and Strauss (1994) found evidence for a positive relationship ($\beta = .16, p < .05$). As such, researchers should probably not assume an individual whom increasingly stays with an organization will be less likely to be terminated based on only a handful of studies investigating involuntary turnover. Finally, research investigating the characteristics of those who leave have largely focused on voluntary turnover. Very little research has investigated the antecedents of involuntary turnover (Barrick et al., 1994; Bluedorn, 1978). This is surprising and unfortunate for two reasons. First, as Barrick et al. point out, an employee who leaves an organization for involuntary reasons is likely to affect an organization in terms of cost as much as an employee who leaves an organization for voluntary reasons. Secondly, it may not be prudent to assume linkages associated with voluntary turnover are tantamount to linkages associated with involuntary turnover. This is especially true if researchers base their postulations concerning turnover on only a minimal amount of studies investigating organizational turnover.

Perhaps one reason there appears to be inconsistent findings between employee tenure and turnover is that the nature of the relationship is curvilinear. That is, previous studies have examined this relationship over a very short period of time. For example, the Barrick et al., (1994) study investigated the relationship between tenure and turnover over only an 18-month period. For a better understanding of this relationship, researchers should employ longer time periods (e.g., 6 to 10 years) to detect such non-linear patterns.

Job Performance and Turnover

One behavioral antecedent of turnover is employee job performance. Researchers have investigated the relationship between employee performance level and both voluntary and involuntary turnover (Kanfer, Crosby, & Brandt, 1988). While a few studies have found evidence for a positive relationship (e.g., Price, 1977), as well as no relationship (e.g., Bluedorn & Abelson, 1980; Sheridan & Vredenburg, 1979), the majority of research in this area has demonstrated evidence for a negative relationship (Schwab, 1991). Wanous, Stumpf, and Bedrosian (1979) involved more than 1700 workers employed in several hundred small businesses in their study. They found significant correlations between supervisors' performance scores of employees and involuntary turnover ($r = -.38$), as well as employee performance and voluntary turnover ($r = -.34$). Employees who performed at lower levels were more likely to voluntarily quit their jobs at the organization.

More recently, three meta-analytic studies conducted to investigate this relationship have concurred with this finding. McEvoy and Cascio (1987) found a correlation between employee performance and involuntary turnover ($r = -.51$), as well as with voluntary turnover ($r = -.31$). Bycio, Hackett, and Alvares (1990) also found highly significant correlations between employee performance and both involuntary ($r = -.52$) and voluntary ($r = .26$) turnover. Finally, a meta-analysis conducted by Williams and Livingstone (1994), found the relationship between performance and voluntary turnover to be significant ($r = -.26$). The authors decided not to include studies measuring involuntary turnover due to the paucity of studies after the Bycio et al. meta-analysis. While research investigating the relationship between job performance and turnover has consistently demonstrated a significant relationship, several studies have used job

performance indicators such as intelligence and education (Kanfer et al., 1988).

Presumably, the justification for this action is based on the high interrelations between these two variables and performance on the job. As Martin, Price, and Mueller (1981) point out, these criteria should not be used as substitutes for actual measures of job performance. The author of the present study agrees with this premise.

Research investigating the relationship between job performance and turnover can have significant practical benefits for organizations. For example, turnover is traditionally viewed as a negative and costly event for organizations due to the losses associated with employee departures (McEvoy & Cascio, 1987). However, one important realization researchers have made in this area is the loss of low-performing employees may not necessarily be dysfunctional, or negative, events for an organization (Schwab, 1991). For example, a low-performing employee who voluntarily quits an organization can be replaced by an employee who subsequently performs at a higher level. Thus, despite the high cost of employee selection and training, the organization may be better off in the end with a new higher-performing employee.

As Dalton, Krackhardt, and Porter (1981) point out, voluntary turnover can be recategorized into two different categories. The first category is termed dysfunctional turnover. In this scenario, the individual wants to leave the organization, but the organization prefers to retain the individual. This represents dysfunctional turnover due to the fact this individual is probably an average to high performing employee, and the organization does not want to lose the individual. The second category of turnover is functional turnover. In this case, the individual wants to leave the organization, but the organization is unconcerned due to the low performance level of the individual. That is,

the organization has a negative evaluation of the individual and thus may be willing to lose this individual in the hopes of obtaining a more productive one.

Furthermore, the Dalton et al. study further illustrates this occurrence by investigating this common assumption that turnover is a negative phenomenon for organizations. They examined termination records of 1,389 bank tellers over a 7-month period. The voluntary rate of turnover among these tellers was 32%. The number of separations by low-performance tellers was subtracted and a dysfunctional turnover rate of only 18% was calculated. Moreover, subtracting the replaceable tellers who had departed further lowered the dysfunctional rate to only 9%. As such, this study demonstrated that 42% of the voluntary turnover was actually beneficial to the organization.

Certainly, the important point from the Dalton et al. study is that an organization that loses a low-performing employee will not necessarily face a difficult situation. The organization may hire a more productive employee. One other important development within this line of research is the idea that the relationship between job performance and turnover is curvilinear (e.g., Jackofsky, 1984). Indeed, research investigating this relationship should greatly expand the understanding of these two constructs.

Jackofsky's Model

As noted earlier, previous studies investigating the performance-turnover relationship have demonstrated findings inconsistent with the majority of relevant research (Wells & Muchinsky, 1985). For example, Bluedorn and Abelson (1980) tested for a nonlinear relationship between performance and voluntary turnover. The researchers did not find evidence for such an effect. One reason for these inconsistent findings may be that the type of organization may act as a moderator within the employee

characteristic-turnover relationship. Studies investigating organizations with different degrees of turnover may be more apt to provide evidence for such a non-linear relationship.

One model that has attempted to explain the discrepancies within this line of research is the Jackofsky (1984) model, which was based on March and Simon's (1958) model. March and Simon's model proposed that voluntary turnover is a function of two primary factors: the perceived desirability of movement from the organization (e.g., job satisfaction) and the perceived ease of movement from the organization (e.g., labor market conditions). Furthermore, March and Simon hypothesized that members of the organization who want to terminate their relationship with the organization will more likely leave the organization more than individuals who do not want to terminate their relationship with the organization.

Jackofsky's (1984) model includes a third primary determinant of turnover, intention to quit, which is based on Locke (1969). According to Locke, forming an intention to quit was a necessary condition that occurs immediately prior to actual behavior. Research has traditionally supported this premise (e.g., Hulin, 1979).

Concerning job performance, Jackofsky hypothesized that performance will have an impact on both ease and desirability of movement. Job performance is expected to impact the desirability of movement indirectly due to moderating influences, such as reward contingencies, individual differences, and leader behavior. Furthermore, Jackofsky hypothesized that job performance is expected to directly affect one's perception that viable alternatives to the current job can be found.

Jackofsky argued that job performance will also affect involuntary turnover. The perceived threat of termination due to low employee performance will force the

individual to terminate their relationship with the organization without evaluating their own desire and ease of movement. Therefore, Jackofsky postulated that the relationship between performance and overall turnover is nonlinear in nature, such that performance and turnover are positively related for good performers, performance and turnover are negatively related for poor performers, and performance and turnover are not related for average performers.

The reasoning behind the postulation is good performers will realize their value as a worker and will be more likely to quit an organization due to the understanding that other opportunities (i.e., better jobs) exist. As such, good performing employees who are not satisfied with the current position will recognize they possess the skills to move elsewhere. Therefore, the employee whom performs well will be more likely to quit due to voluntary reasons, as opposed to involuntary reasons. The hypothesis that employee performance and turnover are negatively related for poor performers rests on the premise that poor performers will be terminated due to poor performance before they have the chance to voluntarily quit. Consequently, these employees will be less likely to quit the organization before being terminated. Therefore, we would be more likely to see the poor performing employees leaving due to involuntary reasons, as opposed to voluntary reasons.

The limited research that has investigated Jackofsky's hypothesis has been mixed. For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Williams and Livingstone (1994), did not find support for this hypothesis considering performance was found to be inversely related to each of the three measures of turnover. Birnbaum and Somers (1993) also reported finding no evidence supporting the hypothesis that employee performance and turnover have a curvilinear relationship. However, in a meta-analysis conducted by

McEvoy and Cascio (1987) the hypothesis set forth by Jackofsky were indirectly tested. Partial support was found, such that performance was negatively related among involuntary turnover leavers. It is presumed that involuntary leavers are poorer performers than voluntary leavers (Wanous, Stumpf, & Bedrosian, 1979). As such, the authors argued that partial support for the Jackofsky (1984) hypothesis was provided. Finally, Trevor, Gerhart, and Boudreau (1997) found evidence for this curvilinear relationship using 5,143 exempt employees. Specifically, both high performing and low performing employees were more likely to quit due to voluntary reasons than involuntary reasons. Average performing employees were found not to be more likely to leave for voluntary or involuntary reasons.

Utility of Research Investigating Turnover Over Expanded Time Periods

As noted earlier, research investigating the relationship between employee characteristics and turnover over an expanded time period is greatly needed to produce a better understanding of the relationship among employee antecedents and turnover (i.e., both voluntary and involuntary). This premise is based on several reasons. First, such data collection over an expanded time period will allow researchers to be able to detect patterns of relationships between antecedents and turnover beyond that of studies that use much shorter time frames. For example, while tenure may be related with voluntary turnover during an initial time frame, tenure may not be related to voluntary turnover during a subsequent time frame. Perhaps tenure is more strongly associated with involuntary turnover during this time period. Thus, a study that encompasses a much greater time period (e.g., 6 to 10 years) would be likely to detect such a pattern beyond that of a study using a lesser time period (e.g., 2 years). Secondly, and related to the first point, research which incorporates a longer time frame of study gives researchers a better

picture of the true relationship between employee antecedents and turnover. For example, the relationship between tenure and turnover may not be linear but, curvilinear in nature. Indeed, as Trevor, Gerhart, and Boudreau (1997) point out, many researchers have called for research that investigates this possibility, and such a study would better investigate this possibility.

Finally, research investigating the relationship among employee antecedents and turnover over an extended period of time would greatly assist practitioners in the field. For example, if a curvilinear relationship between employee tenure and turnover (both voluntary and involuntary) were demonstrated, then organizations may monitor their particular patterns of turnover. For example, organizations may realize that they are more likely to terminate an employee during a particular time period (e.g., during the initial year of employment). Conversely, organizations may find they are more susceptible to employees voluntarily quitting during another time period (e.g., one to three years). As such, the organization may identify the periods of time which indicate a proclivity for either voluntary or involuntary turnover. Thus, organizations will be able to prepare for this upcoming pattern.

Turnover Within Nursing Homes

A considerable body of research has focused on excessive rates of absenteeism and turnover in long term care facilities. Indeed, annual turnover rates within nursing homes range from 40% (Phillips, 1987) to 80% (Crowley, 1993) and to even 100% (Harrington, 1991). As Kiyak, Namazi, and Kahama (1997) point out, this is unfortunate considering high turnover rates cause an instability in the environment, which may cause a feeling of anxiety among geriatric patients. In fact, residents' discharges and death are related to turnover rates of nursing home assistants (Halbur & Fears, 1986).

Moreover, as Waxman, Carner, and Berkenstock (1984) point out, high turnover rates among nursing home employees may undoubtedly have serious consequences making turnover more than just a financial problem for managers and nursing home owners. Medically speaking, workers that abruptly leaves are taking with them knowledge of a patients' habits, background, and emotional needs. As such, the needs of the patient have to be relearned by new workers.

Besides the social and financial costs associated with turnover rates within nursing homes, another reason to study the relationship between employee characteristics and turnover within organizations suffering such high turnover rates is these organizations may be different than ones with lower turnover rates. Researchers should be cautious not to generalize the magnitude and direction of relationships between employee characteristics and turnover from organizations with lower turnover rates to those with higher rates. Put simply, there may be several dynamics about the organization with the higher turnover rate which should be considered before generalizing findings.

The Present Study

The present study investigated the relationship between tenure and turnover (i.e., voluntary and involuntary turnover) over an 8-year period among employees at a large nursing home. Although research investigating these two phenomenon is not new, the present study represented a line of research within this field that will greatly facilitate our understanding of organizational turnover. This is due to the encompassing time frame from which the present study will draw from. Indeed, such an extended time frame will allow patterns between tenure and turnover to be detected, beyond that of studies which have looked at the relationship between tenure and turnover over a much less period of

time. Furthermore, the present study tested whether the relationship between tenure and turnover would be curvilinear. That is, it is expected that within the initial time frame of the study (i.e., < one year), employees who leave the organization would more likely be involuntary leavers, as opposed to leaving voluntarily.

During the second time frame of the study (i.e., one to three years), employees who leave the organization would more likely be voluntary leavers, as opposed to leaving involuntarily. Finally, during the final time frame of the study (i.e., > three years), employees would again be more likely to be involuntary than voluntary leavers. Thus, the present study attempted to add to the current understanding of the relationship between employee tenure and turnover by examining such possible patterns over time. The reasons behind these postulations are discussed next.

During the initial time frame of employment, employees are "learning the ropes," as well as attempting to assimilate to the organization's politics, rules, and general culture. Newer employees may be at greater risk to make mistakes considered to be unacceptable to an organization and consequently, more likely to be terminated during this time period. This may be particularly true for an organization where such a traditional pattern of high turnover rates exists. There obviously may be many reasons why nursing homes suffer from such high turnover rates. For example, research has supported the premise that employees are generally not satisfied with the compensation that is provided by nursing homes (Winston, 1981). An additional possibility that has not been looked at within this type of organization is that of management's attitude toward employees.

Certainly, the attitudes associated with management that views the employee as "easily replaceable" adds greater pressure to terminate lower performers. Employees

may be in a "high risk" period of termination. While the specifics of this issue are beyond the scope of the present study, this possibility acts as the foundation block for the reasoning behind the present study's hypotheses.

Employees surviving the initial time frame enter into the second time frame. These employees may grow suspicious and weary of an organizational climate suffering from high turnover rates. These employees probably are good employees because they survived the potential "weed-out" period (i.e., initial time frame); however, they may become increasingly tired of their job duties and, as stated before, grow weary of facing the constant antagonizing environment of the organization. One other possibility may be that these employees held these positions on only a temporary basis due to various reasons (e.g., graduated from school and moved on). As such, these employees would be more likely to terminate their relationship with the organization as opposed to being terminated themselves.

Finally, employees who have made it through the first two stages enter the final time frame of the present study. These employees probably earn higher wages than in the first two stages. If the organization initially has the attitude that employees are easily replaceable, then these employees may be terminated due to the organization's effort to cut payroll cost. These employees may also have simply burned out with their jobs. Rather than voluntarily quitting their jobs and risk losing particular financial benefits (i.e., collecting unemployment), these employees "sabotage" their performance and perhaps unconsciously put themselves at greater risk to be terminated from their positions. Their performance level falls off the longer they are employed with an organization. Thus, it is predicted that employees who leave the organization during this final time period would more likely be involuntary leavers than voluntary leavers.

Another purpose of the present study was to investigate Jackofsky's (1984) hypothesis that employees classified as poor performers would more likely be involuntary leavers. High performers will more likely be voluntary leavers, and average performers will not be more likely to be voluntary or involuntary leavers. Finally, the present study investigated the differences among performance ratings of employees who departed the organization at the three tenure levels.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the present study were as follows:

Hypothesis 1a: Employees who are no longer employed with the organization during the initial time frame (i.e., < one year) were significantly more likely to be involuntary leavers than voluntary leavers.

Hypothesis 1b: Employees who were no longer employed with the organization during the average time frame (i.e., one to three years) were significantly more likely to be voluntary leavers than involuntary leavers.

Hypothesis 1c: Employees who were no longer employed with the organization during the final time frame (i.e., > three years) were significantly more likely to be involuntary leavers than voluntary leavers.

Hypothesis 2a: Employees who were classified as poor performers were significantly more likely to leave because of voluntarily reasons rather than involuntary reasons.

Hypothesis 2b: Employees who were classified as average performers did not significantly differ as voluntary or involuntary leavers.

Hypothesis 2c: Employees who were classified as good performers were significantly more likely to leave because of voluntary reasons rather than involuntary reasons.

Hypothesis 3: Employees who were no longer employed with the organization during the average time frame (i.e., one to three years) were significantly more likely to have higher performance ratings than employees who departed the organization during the initial time frame (i.e., < one year) or employees who departed during the final time frame (i.e., > three years).

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

Data from archival organizational records of 362 employees at a large nursing home in the Midwest were used in the present study. Data were obtained from records of employees employed at the nursing home from 1988-1996. As Table 1 indicates, approximately 257 employees (71.9%) were classified as voluntary leavers and 115 employees (27.8%) were classified as involuntary leavers. The average tenure among employees used in the present study was 1.6 years. There was no demographic information about the participants available in the present study. However, the majority of employees at this nursing home employed through these years were women.

Ninety-eight of the initial 362 records (27.2 %) included performance data of the employee. However, only 91 of these 98 records were deemed acceptable to include in the present study due to insufficient reason for leaving the organization. The performance data of these employees showed that 55 of the 91 (60.4%) employees had scores that were considered as "Good Performers," 19 (20.8%) employees had scores that indicated "Average Performer," and 17 (18.7%) employees had scores that indicated "Poor Performers."

Additionally, of the 55 "Good Performers," 43 (78.2%) were determined to be voluntary leavers, while 12 (21.8%) were classified as involuntary leavers. Among the "Average Performers," 13 (68.4%) were classified as voluntary leavers, while 6 (31.6%) were classified as involuntary reasons. Finally, among the "Poor Performers," 7 (41.2%) were classified as voluntary leavers, while 10 (58.8%) were classified as involuntary leavers.

Procedures

After obtaining permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A) and the Human Resource Director of the nursing home, data were collected including length of tenure, reason for leaving, and length of notice given. Furthermore, 91 of the 362 employee files included in the present study consisted of performance evaluation scores of employees.

All data were coded numerically for the present study. Length of tenure was coded into three groups: “1” = worked less than one year, “2” = worked one to three years, and “3” = worked longer than three years. For purposes of the present study, tenure time periods (i.e., < one year, one to three years, and > three years) were determined by taking the average length of tenure of the employees and then subtracting and adding one standard deviation ($SD = 1.5$) to this average to obtain an initial time frame (i.e., < one year) and final time frame (i.e., > three years). Voluntary and involuntary turnover were assessed by evaluating the employee's stated reason for leaving using the expanded avoidable/unavoidable taxonomy noted earlier.

Avoidable/voluntary reasons included quitting due to not liking the job and leaving the job for more money. Unavoidable/voluntary reasons in the present study included moving to another location due to spouse as an example. Involuntary turnover reasons included being terminated for any reason, becoming injured or sick, marriage, or personal problems. Employee performance scores were also obtained by accessing archival records.

The performance evaluation scores used by the nursing home were determined by the immediate supervisor of the employee. The scoring system used by the nursing home ranged from a cumulative score of 0 through 10, with 0 being the lowest possible score

and 10 being the highest performance score. The performance appraisal instrument changed 3 times over the eight year period. However, the human resource director stated this instrument had not changed drastically over the years. For example, instrument always contained at least 15 performance criteria statements, (e.g., "Attendance of Employee", "Appearance of Employee", "Quality of Work", and "Knowledge of Job"), and these performance criteria have remained consistent.

Moreover, the director pointed out that throughout the years 1988 through 1996 a cumulative average score of 0 to 4 on the performance instrument was considered a poor performance, 5 to 6 was considered average, and 7–10 was considered a good performance. These criteria were used in the present study.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship among employee tenure, performance level, and both voluntary and involuntary turnover over an eight-year period. Archival organizational data from 362 employees from the years 1988 through 1996 were used in the present study. Ninety-one of these 362 records included the employees' performance evaluation scores. All data were analyzed on the Windows version of the Statistical package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software.

Hypothesis 1

As Table 1 indicates, approximately 257 employees (71.9%) were classified as voluntary leavers and 115 employees (27.8%) were classified as involuntary leavers. The hypothesis investigated the possibility that the relationship between employee tenure and turnover is curvilinear. Specifically, it was expected that employees who are no longer employed with the organization during the initial time frame (i.e., < one year), were more likely to be involuntary leavers than voluntary leavers. Employees who are no longer employed with the organization during the average time frame (i.e., one to three years) were more likely to be voluntary leavers than involuntary leavers. Finally, employees who were no longer employed with the organization during the final time frame (i.e., > three years) were more likely to be involuntary leavers than voluntary leavers.

Given that the data for employee tenure and type of turnover (i.e., voluntary and involuntary) are nominal, Hypothesis 1 was tested using a Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test. The results, presented Table 2, yielded partial support for Hypothesis 1 overall. Specifically, the results did not yield support for Hypothesis 1a, $\chi^2(2, N = 266) = 50.59$, $p < .001$.

Table 1

Frequencies, Means, and Standard Deviations of Turnover and Employee Performance Levels

Variable	Frequency	Mean	SD	Overall Mean
Turnover				
Voluntary	257	1.38 ^a	.63	
Involuntary	<u>115</u>	2.12 ^a	1.94	
	362			1.60 ^a (<u>SD</u> = 1.41)
Performance				
Poor	17	2.93 ^b	1.71	
Average	19	4.21 ^b	2.31	
Good	<u>55</u>	6.81 ^b	1.93	
	91			6.49 ^b (<u>SD</u> = 2.13)

Note. ^aDenotes means in years. ^bDenotes scores on 10 point scale.

Employees no longer employed with the organization during the initial time frame (i.e., < one year) were more likely to be voluntary leavers than involuntary leavers. This was exactly opposite of what was predicted. However, support for Hypothesis 1b was found, $\chi^2(2, N = 59) = 37.44, p < .001$.

Employees no longer employed with the organization during the average time frame (i.e., one to three years) were more likely to be voluntary leavers than involuntary leavers. Results for Hypothesis 1c were not significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 37) = 3.27, ns$. However, the frequency of voluntary ($n = 13$) versus involuntary ($n = 24$) turnover cases were in the hypothesized direction and approached statistical significance.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 included predictions based on Jackofsky's (1984) model. Specifically, it was hypothesized that employees who were classified as poor performers would be more likely to leave due to involuntary reasons beyond that of voluntary reasons. Moreover, it was hypothesized employees who were classified as average performers would not significantly differ as voluntary or involuntary leavers. Finally, it was hypothesized that employees who were classified as either good performers or poor performers would be more likely to leave due to voluntary reasons than involuntary reasons. To test the Jackofsky predictions, Chi Square Goodness of Fit Tests were used. As Table 3 demonstrates, support for these predictions was found.

Specifically, Hypothesis 2a was significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 17) = 3.00, p < .05$. That is, employees classified as poor performers were more likely to leave due to voluntary reasons, as opposed to involuntary reasons. Hypothesis 2b was predicted to be non-significant. Indeed, Hypothesis 2b was supported, $\chi^2(2, N = 19) = 1.31, ns$.

Table 2

Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test For Employee Tenure and
Voluntary/Involuntary Turnover

Turnover	Observed <u>N</u>	Expected <u>N</u>	Residual
<u>Less than one year*</u>			
Voluntary	191	133	58
Involuntary	75	133	-58
<u>One to three years*</u>			
Voluntary	53	29.5	23.5
Involuntary	6	29.5	-23.5
<u>Over three years</u>			
Voluntary	13	18.5	-5.5
Involuntary	24	18.5	5.5

Note. N = 365. * $p < .05$.

Table 3

Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test For Employee Performance and
Voluntary/Involuntary Turnover

Performance	Observed <u>N</u>	Expected <u>N</u>	Residual
<u>Poor*</u>			
Voluntary	7	8.5	1.5
Involuntary	10	8.5	-1.5
<u>Average*</u>			
Voluntary	13	9.5	3.5
Involuntary	6	9.5	-3.5
<u>Good*</u>			
Voluntary	45	27.5	17.5
Involuntary	10	27.5	-17.5

Note. N = 91. * $p < .05$

Employees classified as average performers employed with the organization during the initial time frame (i.e., < one year) were not more likely to leave due to voluntary or involuntary reasons. Finally, Hypothesis 2c was supported, $\chi^2(2, N = 55) = 11.164, p < .05$. Employees classified as good employees were more likely to leave due to voluntary reasons than involuntary reasons.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis predicted that employees who were no longer employed with the organization during the average time frame (i.e., one to three years), would more likely have higher performance ratings than employees who departed the organization during the initial time frame (i.e., < one year) or during the final time frame (i.e., > three years). The hypothesis was tested using a oneway analysis of variance (ANOVA). The ANOVA used performance scores as the dependent variable and employee tenure as the independent variable. Three levels of employee tenure were the initial time frame (i.e., < 1 year), average time frame (i.e., one to three years), and final time frame (i.e., > three years). The results as illustrated in Table 4, yielded a nonsignificant effect for employee performance level, $F(2, 88) = .35, ns$. The mean performance score for departing employees during the initial time period was $M = 6.46, SD = 2.20$. The mean performance score for departing employees during the average time period was $M = 6.81, SD = 1.76$ and $M = 6.00, SD = 1.79$ for employees departing during the final time period. This results suggest there are no significant differences between the length of employment and the performance level of employee.

Table 4

Oneway Analysis Variance for Type of Turnover on Performance Ratings

Source	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Between	25.93	2	12.97	.35	.70
Within groups	368.82	88	4.19		
Total	394.75	90			

Note. N = 91

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the characteristics of employee tenure, performance level, and both voluntary and involuntary turnover over an 8-year time-period. While a substantial amount of literature investigating the relationship between these employee characteristics and turnover exists, most have only assessed this relationship over very short time periods (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1994). As such, the present study attempted to further our understanding of these relationships by investigating data over an extended period of time.

Specifically, the present study investigated the possibility of a curvilinear relationship among employee performance level, employee tenure, and both voluntary and involuntary turnover. As noted before, there have been only a limited number of studies investigating the possibility of a curvilinear relationship between employee performance and turnover (McEvoy & Cascio, 1987; Trevor et al. 1997), and no studies have investigated the possibility of a non-linear relationship between employee tenure and turnover. In the present study, archival organizational data were collected from 362 employees working during the 1988 through 1996 time period. Ninety-one of the 362 employee records included performance evaluation data.

Interpretation of Results

Hypothesis 1 investigated the possibility of a curvilinear relationship between employee tenure and turnover. Specifically, Hypothesis 1a predicted that employees who were no longer employed with the organization during the initial time frame (i.e., <

one year), would be more likely leave for involuntary reasons, as opposed to voluntary reasons.

Contrary to this hypothesis, employees no longer employed during the initial time frame were more likely to leave for voluntary reasons. This finding was completely opposite of what was predicted. One possible explanation of this finding may be that during the first year of work employees find they simply cannot handle the work. In the present study, the human resource director noted that the nursing home suffered from high turnover. Employees find the initial work load too demanding, both physically and mentally, and decide to quit the job before more time is invested with the organization. Although the present study did not compute an annual turnover rate, this would seem indicative of an industry that often suffers turnover rates as high as 100% annually (Harrington, 1991).

A second explanation of the finding that employees are more likely to leave due to voluntary reasons during the first the year of employment is discontent due to low compensation packages. Indeed, most studies investigating the high attrition rates of nursing home employees have identified low wages and benefits as a main culprit (Waxman, Carner, & Berkenstock, 1984). The nursing home used in the present study is no exception. For example, many employees of the nursing home were cited as stating "better pay" ($n = 131$) as reason for leaving the organization.

Hypothesis 1b predicted that employees who were no longer employed with the organization during the average time frame (i.e., one to three years) would be more likely to leave for voluntary reasons as opposed to involuntary reasons. During the average time frame, employees were more likely to leave for voluntary reasons than involuntary reasons. Employees who depart from the organization have finally reached a point where they are no longer able to continue their job functions and voluntarily leave their

positions. One other explanation for this finding is employees may have entered into a stage where the workload of the organization is greater than at other stages. Perhaps the nature of the positions across the board at the nursing home are "serial" in nature in that management demands more and more from employees as their tenure increases.

Hypothesis 1c predicted that employees who were no longer employed with the organization during the final time frame (i.e., > three years) were more likely to depart from the organization for involuntary reasons, as opposed to voluntary reasons. Chi Square tests revealed no significant differences between these two turnover leavers during this time frame. One possible explanation for this was the small frequency counts of employees who worked longer than 3 years. Specifically, in the present study only 37 employees were categorized as "greater than three years". However, the frequencies of cases of voluntary ($n = 13$) vs. involuntary ($n = 24$) leavers were in the hypothesized direction and approaching statistical significance.

While only partial support was found for the employee tenure-turnover curvilinear hypothesis, the relationship may be more evident over a longer time period. That is, the present study used three time periods: the initial time period (i.e., < one year), the average time period (i.e., one to three years), and the final time period (i.e., > three years). A curvilinear relationship may only be detected with time frames set at greater lengths of time (e.g., 0 to 6 years, 7 to 12 years, etc.). Indeed, although Hypothesis 1c was not found to be significant, the observed frequencies did suggest that there were more involuntary leavers than voluntary leavers.

Overall, the present study demonstrated that an employee is more likely to voluntarily leave the organization during the first year of employment. During the time period of one to three years, the employees are more likely to voluntarily quit their

position with the organization. Finally, after three years, the employee will not more likely leave due to voluntary or involuntary reasons. The second purpose of the present study was to investigate Jackofsky's (1984) hypothesis that the relationship between employee performance and turnover is curvilinear. It was expected that good performing, as well as poor performing employees would be more likely to leave due to voluntary reasons, as opposed to involuntary reasons. Average employees were not expected to differ significantly as either voluntary or involuntary leavers. Support for her hypothesis was provided in the present study. Hypothesis 2a predicted employees that were classified as poor performers were more likely to depart from the organization for voluntary reasons than involuntary reasons. Indeed, this is what was found.

As Jackofsky (1984) suggested, employees who are performing poorly recognize through several mediums (e.g., performance evaluations), they may be at risk for termination. As such, these employees decide to voluntarily terminate their relationship with the organization before they themselves are terminated. Hypothesis 2b was predicted to be non-significant, and indeed, this prediction was supported. Specifically, employees classified as average performers were not more likely to be voluntary or involuntary leavers.

Finally, Hypothesis 2c was supported. Employees classified as good performers were more likely to leave the organization due to voluntary reasons than involuntary reasons. This finding further adds support to Jackofsky's premise that good performers recognize their value as worker and have opportunities at other organizations. Moreover, the strong support for Jackofsky's (1984) hypothesis in the present study is inconsistent with prior research (e.g., Birnbaum & Somers, 1993; Williams & Livingstone, 1994) which reported partial support at best.

Finally, the present study investigated employee performance level at during different stages of tenure. It was expected employees who were no longer employed with the organization during the average time frame (i.e., one to three years), would be more likely to have higher performance ratings than employees who depart the organization during the initial period (i.e., < one year), or final period (i.e., > three years). Hypothesis 3 did not receive support from the present study. Employees who were no longer employed during the average time frame (i.e., one to three years) did not have higher performance ratings than employees who departed in either the initial (i.e., < one year) or final (i.e., one to three years) time frame. One possible reason for this lack of support was the small sample size included for these levels. For example, only 17 employees were classified in the poor performer group and 19 employees were classified in the average performer group.

Limitations

Despite some interesting findings, there are several limitations to the present study. First, the sample of the present study analyzed data from only one nursing home. Due to practical restraints and accessibility, data from other organizations were not used. As such, researchers should consider this factor when evaluating the generalizability of the present study.

The second limitation involves the data of the present study. Due to the nature of the study, data had to be collected from organizational exit interviews. Therefore, the researcher could not verify the veracity of reasons for departure stated by the employee. Moreover, much of the information concerning the consistency and use of the performance appraisal used by the nursing home over time was taken at face value. Past performance appraisal instruments were not viewed by the investigator of the present

study. As such, the reliance of the Human Resource director as a source for information is another factor to be viewed cautiously.

A third limitation of the present study involves the available performance appraisal scores of the employees. Although the cumulative performance evaluation scores of the individuals were given, there is no indication of when these evaluations took place during the employee's tenure. That is, employees may have received several evaluations during their span of time with the organization. It is likely that the one performance evaluation given was the most recent one. The performance of the employee may only be indicative of a very short period relative to the entire tenure of the employee. Moreover, the employee performance evaluation form changed several times over the eight year period. Although the content of the evaluation (i.e., performance domains) remained consistent over the years, this was only taken at face value from the Human Resource director. Therefore, the veracity of this statement should be considered with caution.

A final limitation of the present study is the small sample size particularly for tenure groups "one to three years" and "greater than three years." Only 59 employees were grouped in the average time frame, while only 37 employees were grouped in the final time frame. Therefore, these small sample sizes may have affected the results of Hypothesis 1.

Implications and Future Research

Although support for the curvilinear hypothesis between employee tenure and type of turnover was limited, research investigating employee characteristics and turnover over longer time periods should not be discarded. As stated above, it may be that a curvilinear relationship exists, but may only be detected using longer time

intervals. For example, the findings of the present study indicated that from zero to three years, employees were more likely to leave due to voluntary reasons. Although the findings indicated nonsignificant results for the tenure interval "greater than three years," the frequency of cases (voluntary vs. involuntary) were in the hypothesized direction and approaching significance.

However, due to low sample size within this interval, significance was not obtained. As such, a curvilinear relationship may not be detectable using the time intervals of the present study. Despite the limited evidence of a non-linear relationship between tenure and turnover in the present study, there is evidence that such a non-linear relationship between these variables exists. Future research should continue to investigate this postulation by using greater time intervals to detect such a relationship. As stated before, one main implication for finding such a relationship would indicate organizations may go through "periods" of a particular type of turnover (i.e., voluntary or involuntary), and would give the organization an opportunity to take proactive measures in combating these periods. Such insight into the "turnover madness" many organizations face may allow these organizations an opportunity to impede these costs.

Strong support was found for Jackofsky's (1984) hypothesis that the relationship between employee performance and turnover is curvilinear in nature. This finding is consistent with Trevor, et al. (1997), who found that high and low performing employees were more likely to leave an organization due to voluntary reasons as opposed to involuntary ones. Yet, future research should strive to replicate these findings. Prior studies have not found evidence for this hypothesis (e.g., Birnbaum & Somers, 1993; Williams & Livingstone, 1994). Moreover, future research should investigate the possibility of moderating influences (e.g., type of organization), to explain these

inconsistent findings within the literature. For example, the hypotheses may hold true for one type of organization but not another.

The findings of the present study should be useful to both researchers and practitioners alike. First, the finding that the relationship between employee performance level and turnover is curvilinear should give researchers additional insight into this relationship. For example, such a finding suggests that the performance level of an employee may not necessarily ensure the employee will stay, as many turnover models have suggested (e.g., Mobley, 1982). Secondly, the finding that employees classified as good performers are more likely to quit due to voluntary reasons, as opposed to involuntary reasons should alarm many organizations. It may not be prudent to assume that an employee who is performing well will automatically stay with an organization. Thus, organizations need to spend a greater amount of time monitoring the attitudes and matching appropriate compensation packages of all employees, including the good performers.

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APPENDIX A
APPROVAL LETTER FROM
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD



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GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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October 13, 1998

Jason D. Phillips
728 Valley Drive
Emporia, KS 66801

Dear Mr. Phillips:

The Institutional Review Board for Treatment of Human Subjects has evaluated **your application** for approval of human subject research entitled, "Employee Tenure, Performance, and Turnover: Field Study Evidence for Curvilinear Relations." The review board approved **your application** which will allow you to begin your research with subjects as outlined in your **application materials**.

Best of luck in your proposed research project. If the review board can help you in any other way, don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Timothy M. Downs, Ph.D.
Dean, Graduate Studies and Research

pf

I, Jason D. Phillips, hereby submit this thesis to Emporia State University as partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree. I agree that the Library of the University may make it available for use in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I further agree that quoting, photocopying, or other reproduction of this document is allowed for private study, scholarship (including teaching) and research purposes of a nonprofit nature. No copying which involves the potential financial gain will be allowed without the written permission of the author.

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Employee Tenure, Performance Level, and
Turnover: Field Study Evidence For
Curvilinear Relations

Title of Thesis

Doug Cooper
Signature of Graduate Office Staff Member

December 14, 1998
Date Received

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