

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This research examined how the relationship among affective commitment, perceived organizational support, and voluntary turnover is influenced by stress at work. Affective commitment was expected to mediate the relationship between perceived organizational support and voluntary turnover. Low levels of stress were expected to have a more significant impact on the relationship than moderate to high levels. Exchange ideology was expected to help explain dynamics of the relationship. This study showed that the affective commitment, perceived organizational support, voluntary turnover relationship is significantly influenced by stress levels. Exchange ideology correlated with affective commitment and perceived organizational support but did not mediate the two nor did it correlate with voluntary turnover. Affective commitment mediated the relationship between perceived organizational support and voluntary turnover.

THE IMPACT OF STRESS ON THE AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT, PERCEIVED
ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT, VOLUNTARY TURNOVER RELATIONSHIP

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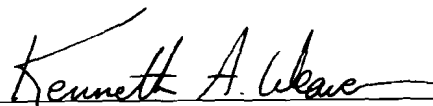
Master of Science

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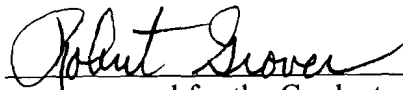
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There are many influences on an employee's intention to continue working for an organization that result from both organizational and non-organizational factors (Chiu & Ng, 1999). Although both categories are multifaceted, the focus of this research is on those factors that can be manipulated by management because it is those factors that an organization can control. There are two major products of social exchange theory, perceived organizational support and affective commitment. Their influence on voluntary turnover and relationship with job stress levels will be investigated.

The perceived organizational support, affective commitment, voluntary turnover connection begins with employee perceptions that the organization cares about and values them, or perceived organizational support (POS) (Hutchinson, 1997a). This perception shapes the employee's felt obligation to continue working for an organization, or that employee's affective commitment (AC) to the organization (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). High levels of affective commitment are negatively correlated with turnover related behavior (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). The focus of this research is on extremely low levels of stress, or boredom, because of its association with social exchange theory and perceived organizational support. Moderate and high stress levels will be examined to understand the full effects of low stress levels. Social exchange theory explains that lower levels of stress do not strongly affect perceived organizational support (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997). Perceptions of organizational

support may not decrease voluntary turnover or increase affective commitment when stress levels are low. Thus, the intention of this research is to examine whether the relationship among perceived organizational support, affective commitment, and turnover is weakened in jobs characterized mainly by low levels of stress. The findings of this research will provide further understanding of the mechanisms by which social exchange theory works to reduce voluntary turnover allowing an organization the increased ability to retain employees. It will also clarify the role of stress levels concerning the perceived organizational support, affective commitment, voluntary turnover relationship.

Exchange Ideology

Social exchange theory concerns expectations in relationships (Chadwick-Jones, 1976). According to Chadwick-Jones (1976), several theories have stemmed from social exchange theory making it a broad base for many social psychological principles that concern perceptions and expectations in relationships. One such theory involves the nature of a payoff relationship where "the outcomes for any participant in an ongoing interaction can be stated in terms of the rewards received and the costs incurred by the participant, where these values depend on the behaviors produced by the two persons" (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978, p. 8). A person's actions are often reactions to another party and the reverse relationship applies as well. The theory can further be explained by the norm of reciprocity which asserts that when an employee receives favorable treatment from an organization, that employee will in turn feel obligated to care about the welfare of the organization according. Specific to the work environment, employees believe that work should depend upon treatment by the

organization refers to that employee's exchange ideology (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986). The combination of these theories suggests that there is a relationship between employees and their organization so that the employee may feel a need for reciprocity from that organization. When an organization treats an employee in an acceptable manner, that employee will exert more effort if work results in favorable treatment. This is relevant to the current research because it implies that an employee's expectations of the company will predict efforts and in turn attitudes.

To exemplify this point, Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, and Taylor (2000) examined the effects of fair treatment from the organization to its employees on their working relationship. The authors examined the effects of specific aspects of fairness perceptions in relation to employee intention to discontinue working for the organization and employee job performance. They found that perceptions of the fairness in the exchange between the employee and the organization are related to job performance, satisfaction, and supervisor directed extra-role behaviors with correlations of $r = .18$, $r = .14$, and $r = .18$ respectively. Secondly, employee expectations of acceptable exchange in terms of formal organizational procedures is significantly related to an employee's job satisfaction, extra-role behaviors on the behalf of the organization, and general commitment to the organization with correlations of $r = .37$, $r = .31$, and $r = .38$ respectively. They also found that these three variables are related to employee intentions to leave the organization, $r = -.51$, $r = -.78$, and $r = -.48$ respectively. Thus, fulfilling expectations of reciprocity between

organization and employee predicts job performance, satisfaction, extra-role behaviors, and intentions to leave the organization.

Affective Commitment

An employee's feelings of commitment to an organization result from many different aspects of the organization and thus can create different forms of commitment. Two major forms of commitment are affective and continuance commitment. Continuance commitment (CC) refers to an employees' need to stay with an organization due mainly to the costs of leaving that organization (Meyer, Allen & Gellatly, 1990). Affective commitment (AC) refers to employees emotional bond to the organization, or their want to stay (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Stephen, 2001). Affective commitment, but not continuance commitment, is highly related to perceptions of organizational support with correlations of .64 and -.08 respectively (Shore & Wayne, 1993).

There is speculation over whether Affective commitment (AC) can be externally manipulated. If internal states govern AC, there may seem to be no need to understand its dynamics other than for identification of existing AC levels. Affective commitment as an innate function may imply that management does not have a real role in manipulating employee loyalty or desire to stay with the organization. Non-organizational factors include an emphasis on decision making based on forces that cause a "shock" or unexpected event. Employees may respond to the event instead of any feelings towards the organization itself (Lee, Mitchell, Wise, & Fireman 1996). Another non-organizational factor is career commitment or one's commitment to job type, which is not related to any particular organization (Chang, 1999).

Although factors such as these pose a strong argument for a focus on non-organizational factors, they imply that managerial interventions are a moot venture and are in direct contrast with several models that indicate the need for managerial manipulation of affective commitment. Also, studies on such unchanging factors as work family conflict have proven that managers can have an influence on affective commitment when they are aware of differences in groups and how to appease them reasonably (Chiu & Ng, 1999). The causal focus of this paper is on the aspects of an organization that influence affective commitment.

There are several factors to consider even when the causal focus is narrowed to those things that are influenced by organizational practices. For the purpose of this research examining the causes of affective commitment other than perceived organizational support is less important because there are so many and because they are not relevant to the perceived organizational support-affective commitment-turnover model being observed here. Affective commitment, as related to perceived organizational support and turnover, however, has two major distinctive antecedents, perceived supervisor support, and justice theory (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). In order to understand how each contributes to the relationship among AC, perceived organizational support and turnover, perceived organizational support must be explained.

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support (POS) is the employee's belief in "the extent to which an organization values their contributions and cares about their well being"

(Eisenberger et al., 2002, p. 565). There are several explanations as to how employees form this perception. According to organizational support theory, POS is formed in order to meet socio-emotional needs and to assess the organizations readiness to reward increased efforts (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades, et al., 2001). Social exchange theory says that there is a reciprocal relationship between behavior and commitment so that employees will behave in ways that connect them to their organization resulting in favorable treatment from that organization and then employee's positive attitude towards the organization (Hutchinson, 1997). The concept of a reciprocity norm that obligates one person to treat another favorably due to previous favorable treatment given from that other person has also been related to the development of POS (Eisenberger et al., 2001; LaMastro, 2001). Eisenberger et al. (2001) used exchange ideology and organizational support theory research to hypothesize that POS would be positively related to an employee's felt obligation to both care about an organization and help it reach its goals. Eisenberger et al. (2001) used a survey to gather data from a large mail processing facility in the northeastern part of the United States. These authors correlated POS with felt obligation and found support for their hypothesis with a correlation of .38, significant at the .05 level.

Other aspects of the organization's treatment of the employee, such as the need for approval, goal fulfillment, adequate rewards, favorable work experience, and fairness in the amount and distribution of resources, have all been associated with the development of perceived organizational support because they demonstrate to the employee the extent to which that organization values them (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Hutchinson, 1997a; LaMastro, 2001; Rhoades et al., 2001).

Conclusively, POS is the result of an employee's perceptions of fairness and loyalty on the part of the organization. The perceptions are influenced by two major aspects of that organization including perceived supervisor support (PSS) and procedural justice (PJ).

Perceived Supervisor Support

Research has suggested that supervisors play a large role in the POS-turnover relationship because, through the mechanisms of the norm of reciprocity, perceived supervisor support has a positive correlation with employee obligation to both supervisors and that organization itself (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Stinglehamber & Vandenberghe, 2003; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002;).

Specifically, Eisenberger et al. (2002) found that PSS serves to strengthen overall POS and to decrease voluntary turnover. These researchers hypothesized that PSS would be positively related to a temporal change in POS among other hypotheses and that POS would mediate a negative relationship between PSS and voluntary employee turnover. In order to demonstrate significant results for the first hypothesis, they correlated POS and PSS in a survey of alumni from a Belgium university who graduated between 1997 and 1998. Half of the original sample responded to the survey when given a second time three months later. There was a significant relationship between PSS at time one and POS at time two with a correlation of .24 significant at the .001 level. To test the second hypothesis, they surveyed a sample of 521 employees working for a chain of discount electronics and appliance stores in the northeastern United States. The researchers used hierarchical logistic regression and

found that the relationship between PSS and voluntary turnover is less certain than that between POS and voluntary turnover with correlation coefficients of $-.11$ significant at the $.05$ level and $-.24$ significant at the $.001$ level respectively. The second hypothesis was supported as POS mediated the PSS-turnover relationship.

Lastly, they also documented the fact that in supporting POS, supervisors are performing PSS by definition, creating a loop among PSS, POS, and turnover. This loop demonstrates how PSS can serve to distort the connection between POS and voluntary turnover. Affective commitment can be understood as the result of a combination between PSS and POS or of POS alone leading to turnover.

Procedural Justice

Procedural justice involves perceptions of fairness of the means used to decipher the amount and distribution of organizational resources among employees, according to Rhoades et al. (2001). These researchers note two determinants of procedural justice, structural and social aspects of an organization. Structural aspects involve organizational rules and regulations about decisions that affect employees, including employee input in the decision process, notice prior to decision implementation, and receiving accurate information (Rhoades et al., 2001, p. 825). These authors also explain that social aspects refer to “quality of interpersonal treatment in resource allocation” (Rhoades et al., 2001, p. 825). The researchers hypothesized that POS would mediate a positive relationship between procedural justice and AC. They surveyed a sample of alumni from a university in the eastern part of the United States. The researchers found a positive relationship between procedural justice and affective commitment, $r = .42$, as well as a positive relationship between procedural justice and

perceived organizational support, $r = 0.59$. POS was proven to be a moderator of the two possibly because when instances of procedural justice occur frequently, they contribute to heightened levels of POS by indicating a concern for employees' welfare (Rhoades et al., 2001).

For further evidence of a relationship between POS and procedural justice, Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, and Taylor (2000) surveyed 651 employees of a large public university in the northeastern region of the United States. They found that POS and procedural justice are positively related, $r = .52$. Moorman, Blakely, and Niehoff (1998) also found a positive correlation of .69 between procedural justice and perceived organizational support in their survey of civilian hospital workers on a military base in the Midwest. Lastly, Barling and Philips (1993) found a relationship between affective commitment and procedural justice. Through the use of a scenario questionnaire, Barling and Philips (1993) found that an employee's perception of fairness concerning procedure implementation was positively related to affective commitment.

The Relationship between AC and POS

Perceived organizational support (POS) mediates the relationship between perceived supervisor support and/or procedural justice and affective commitment (AC). (Eisenberger et. al., 2001; Eisenberger et. al., 2002; LaMastro, 2001; Rhoades, 2001). However, there is no consensus on an entire causal model for POS predictors, POS and AC, or other mediating variables present in those models.

Several relationships between AC and POS have demonstrated validity including the notions that they are both linked to felt obligation (Eisenberger et al.,

2001, p. 44), and an organization's reward system (Eisenberger et al. 2001; Rhoades et al., 2001). Felt obligation is a better mediator than positive mood with a correlation to POS of .38 and to affective commitment of .45 (Eisenberger et al. 2001). If the rewards system is not perceived as fair, according to the norm of reciprocity, employee POS will be violated (Randall & Mueller, 1995; Rhoades et al., 2001). Benefits received from an organization may help employees form emotional attachment to it (Rhoades et al., 2001).

These relationships between AC and POS imply the need to understand employee cognition before understanding a true relationship between POS and AC. They also demonstrate dynamics of the norm of reciprocity and social exchange theory. Although they are significantly related and have antecedents in common, affective commitment and perceived organizational support are unique constructs (Hutchinson, 1997 b; Stinglhamber & Vandenberghe, 2003).

Research has consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between AC and POS, $r = .64$ (Shore & Wayne, 1993), $r = .76$ (Hutchinson, 1997 A), and $r = .39$ (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Specifically, Rhoades et al. (2001) surveyed employees in a large electronics and appliance sales organization in the northeastern part of the United States. They surveyed the employees twice separating them into two groups. One group was surveyed again after two years and the other after three. They found that POS and AC were related at time one for the two year interval group with a correlation of .84 and at time one for the three year interval group with a correlation of .79. They also found that POS at time one and AC at time two were significantly related for the two and three year interval groups with correlations of .23 and .20.

Voluntary Turnover

Voluntary turnover, an employee purposefully leaving an organization (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001), has been associated with high costs of training and lowered organizational effectiveness, according to Caudill and Patrick (1991-1992), Lekan-Rutledge, Palmer, and Belyea (1998), and McAiney, as cited in Yeats and Seward (2000). There are several reasons associated with boredom that explain why an employee decides to discontinue working for an organization. The employee is more likely to quit a boring job, according to Johns, Gutmann, DeWald and Nunn (2001), who administered a survey to dental hygienists in Texas. They found that boredom, measured by the statement “the practice of dental hygiene is boring” (p. 11), was listed by 95% of those surveyed to be a reason to quit their jobs. This was the second most frequently used reason for leaving the practice. Employees are also more likely to quit a job if they feel that they will be able to find another job, which refers to their perceived ease of movement (Blau, 1993). A high perceived ease of movement means that the employee feels that it is possible to find an acceptable position in another company. Through the use of a survey, Blau (1993) found that turnover and ease of movement perceptions were related with a positive correlation of .13 for registered nurses. Lastly, employees are likely to discontinue working for an organization if they have not done well on performance evaluations, according to McBey (1996), who that low performance ratings yielded higher turnover rates when evaluations were done by supervisors and employees. In order to measure voluntary turnover, some researchers choose to view company records that illustrate the turnover rate of a particular job (Blau, 1993; Rhoades et al. 2001; Singh & Schwab,

1998), while other researchers look at correlates with turnover such as withdrawal behavior and intention to quit (Blau, 1993; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Geurts, Schaufeli, & Jonge, 1998; Koys, 2001)

AC, POS, and Voluntary Turnover

Eisenberger et al. (2001) reported that perceived organizational support and withdrawal behavior are correlated, $r = .12$. Rhoades et al. (2001) found that voluntary turnover correlated with affective commitment and perceived organizational support at $-.23$ and $-.21$ respectively. According to Rhoades et al. (2001), perceived organizational support and affective commitment work to decrease turnover because POS can strengthen AC. AC enhances an employee's feelings of belonging and identification with the organization. Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez (2001) found that perceived organizational support is more strongly related to turnover than affective commitment. Most others have shown that the relationship between perceived organizational support and turnover is strengthened by affective commitment or that affective commitment has a stronger relationship with voluntary turnover than perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Randall & Mueller, 1995; Rhoades et al., 2001). There are three consistencies in the literature which are that affective commitment is positively related to perceived organizational support, AC and POS can strengthen each other, and perceived organizational support is negatively related to turnover (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Hutchinson 1997a; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Rhoades et al., 2001; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Stinglehamber & Vandenberghe, 2003). When affective

commitment is considered, the relationship between perceived organizational support and turnover is clarified.

In summation, affective commitment is fostered by perceptions of organizational support. When an employee senses a fair reciprocal relationship between him or her and the organization, that employee is inclined to become affectively committed to the organization and to remain with that organization. Organizational loyalty, or affective commitment, and retention are, at least in part, a product of employee's perceptions of reciprocal exchange with that organization. When employees perceive that the organization appreciates or supports them, they are more loyal to that organization and more likely to stay with that organization.

Gender

There are differences in voluntary turnover for men and women due to perceptions concerning promotion. These perceptions are related to affective commitment in that the major cause of voluntary turnover for women is the need for job advancement which is negatively correlated with affective commitment for both men and women (Chau & Ng, 1999). Women typically find fewer opportunities for advancement so that a woman who is being considered for a promotion is likely to become affectively committed to an organization and less likely to leave a company (Chui & Ng, 1999; Lyness & Judiesch, 2001). Lyness and Judiesch (2001) found that "when a promotion had occurred 11 months prior, there was no longer a negative effect on turnover, and managers who had been promoted more than 11 months ago were more likely to resign than managers who had not received a promotion within that time period" (p. 1173). Further, these authors state that the female managers

promoted during that time period were less likely to resign than male managers promoted in that time period. Generally, women are more likely to stay than men (Lyness & Judiesch, 2001).

Conclusively, affective commitment and perceived organizational support are both based on the norm of reciprocity and social exchange theory. These mechanisms combine to shape and explain an employee's perception of the organization and to predict the likelihood of that employee's intention to stay with that organization.

Boredom

According to the opponent process theory by Solomon and Corbit (1974), people need to experience an optimum state of arousal or equilibrium. The theory explains that people have a desired comfortable level of arousal and that when this level is too high or low, people will attempt to regain the optimum level or equilibrium. Low levels of arousal or boredom are thus unacceptable, and the person will attempt to regain equilibrium by increasing arousal. People may attempt to regain their optimal level of arousal by seeking out situations whose complexity is neither too high nor too low for that person, according to Mikulas and Vodanovich (1993). These authors explain that when complexity levels are slightly greater than the individual's level, the situation is both pleasing and reinforcing. They further explain that boredom is often the result of being in a situation with complexity levels that are too low for the individual, leaving that individual with below optimal arousal. Perceptions of the complexity of the situation are what define it as boring for each person. In order for this low level of arousal to be considered boredom, Mikulas and Vodanovich (1993) state that it must be unpleasant to the person and attributed to

inadequate stimulation so that it is not confused with something else such as depression.

Iso-Ahola and Weissinger cited in Geiwitz (1966) found that feelings of boredom were positively related to low levels of arousal that could be the result of personality which would be a trait, or the nature of the task which would be a state (Sawin & Scerbo, 1995; Vodanovich, Weddle, & Piotrowski, 1997). Regardless of a person's proneness to boredom, acts that involve high levels of vigilance induce boredom according to Prinzell and Freeman (1997), Sawin and Scerbo (1995), and Vodanovich, et al. (1997). These authors explain that vigilant tasks require one to pay close attention to specified details generally for a long period of time.

Lester's (1997) study exemplified differences in vigilance task proficiency according to gender by first asking both men and women to pay close attention to a pair of lines on a screen and record occasional changes in the height of each line (which is considered a spatial vigilance task). The participants were also given a temporal vigilance task requiring them to record the amount of time the pair of lines remained on the screen. They were then asked to rate the tasks according to mental demand, physical demand, effort, temporal demand, performance, frustration, and boredom. He found that women did not perform as well on the spatial task as men and that women had higher boredom ratings of both tasks compared to men. Women also perceived the overall workload as higher than men. All of these findings indicate that although levels of vigilance will predict relative levels of boredom in an organization, women have higher ratings of boredom when the vigilance tasks require spatial ability. Regardless of gender, extreme cases of boredom, as caused by virtual

lack of environmental stimulation, can hinder a person's ability to concentrate on specific tasks (Heron, 1957) and is related to increased feelings of constraint, unpleasantness, and repetitiveness (Geiwitz, 1996).

Emotional Exhaustion

Conversely, exposure to long periods of high amounts of stress can cause an employee to exhibit symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder which is characterized by "a) re-experiencing a traumatic event; b) avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of responsiveness to the outside world; and c) other cognitive reactions indicative of increased arousal" (Vettor & Kosinski, 2000, p. 218). This kind of extreme reaction to stress occurs in jobs such as the emergency medical services that demand quick action in life threatening situations.

More commonly, however, the symptoms of over exposure to high amounts of job stress are characterized by feelings of emotional exhaustion or feelings of overextension of emotional resources and the perception of excessive psychological and emotional demands (Guerts, Schaufeli, & DeJonge, 1998). The state of being overly exerted is often called burnout, but burnout also refers to feelings of both depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1993). The definition of emotional exhaustion is the closest to a raw definition of the psychological effects of high stress levels. The other two aid in defining a psychological syndrome that may occur when a person has worked in a helping profession for a prolonged period of time, burnout (Maslach, 1993, chap. 2). The burnout syndrome is said to be a sort of adaptation to the helping professions working environment (Maslach, 1993). Stressors in the environment such as workload or role

conflict can cause all three symptoms to occur and thus burnout (Winnubust, 1993). Burnout can be treated by giving employees social support and by evaluating the current support system. Maslach (1993) makes it clear that emotional exhaustion should be the only component of the burnout model used to measure high levels of stress.

Cropanzano, Rupp, and Byrne (2003) examined the relationship of emotional exhaustion to aspects of the employee's relationship with the job such as organizational commitment and voluntary turnover. They defined emotional exhaustion as "a chronic state of emotional and physical depletion" (p. 160). These authors hypothesized that emotional exhaustion would be: a) negatively related to organizational commitment, b) positively related to turnover, c) negatively related to job performance, and d) negatively related to organizational citizenship behavior beneficial to either the organization (OCBO) or the employee's supervisor (OCBS). They also hypothesized that organizational commitment would at least partially mediate the relationship between emotional exhaustion and a) turnover intentions, b) job performance ratings, and c) OCBO and OCBS. The authors used correlations and regression analysis to understand the results of the surveys. The surveys were completed by 915 hospital workers at a hospital in the western part of the United States. They found that emotional exhaustion is negatively related to organizational commitment, $r = -.46$, job performance, $r = .26$, and OCBO $r = -.25$ respectively. Emotional exhaustion was positively related to turnover intention with a correlation of $.57$. Emotional exhaustion was not significantly related to OCBS.

The authors tested the idea that organizational commitment mediates the relationship between affective commitment and the outcome variables using multiple regression analysis. They found that organizational commitment, along with the demographic variables age, ethnicity, and gender had a significant beta weight for all of the outcome variables. Added to each equation, emotional exhaustion they was significant for turnover only. The authors also used multiple regression analysis for the demographic variables and emotional exhaustion alone and found significance for emotional exhaustion and organizational commitment, turnover, job performance, and OCBO. The authors concluded that organizational commitment may mediate the relationship between emotional exhaustion and the outcome variables.

Guerts et al. (1998) also found that high stress levels, or emotional exhaustion, can lead an employee to withdraw from an organization and they explain that an employee may do so emotionally by becoming less engaged in work activities or behaviorally by exhibiting an intention to leave (Guerts et al., 1998). These symptoms are said to be the result of a lack of reciprocity perceptions in the individual's employment relationship (Guerts et al., 1998).

Stress and Social Exchange

An employee's perceptions of organizational support are not strongly influenced by aspects of a job that the organization cannot itself control but are strongly influenced by aspects of the job that the organization can control (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997). These authors found that low levels of stress or pressure associated with an employee's job are not considered to be controlled by an organization. However, high levels of stress on the job are

considered to be controllable by the organization. If an employee characterizes the job as low in stress, the POS, AC, turnover relationship may be weakened because the relationship between POS and low job stress is weak. If an employee characterizes the job as high in stress, the POS, AC, turnover relationship may be strengthened because the relationship between POS and high job stress is strong. This may also be the case because, as previously stated, burnout can be treated with organizational support (Winnubust, 1993). It is highly probable that high stress levels experienced or emotional exhaustion, would be lessened by perceptions of organizational support. This implies that when stress levels and POS levels are high, AC, and voluntary turnover levels should be significantly lower than in a boring situation.

The strength of the relationship does not dictate the type of relationship that will occur but these findings do imply that the norm of reciprocity and social exchange may be weakened by an employee's perception of a job as low in stress.

Hypotheses

The relationship among the major variables mentioned in this research starts with an employee's need for the organization to reciprocate his or her efforts, or exchange ideology (EI). If an employee has low Exchange Ideology, then he or she will most likely perform their work poorly compared to a person who expects that efforts will be properly rewarded (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000) and will be more likely to voluntarily leave the organization. An employee with high Exchange Ideology will expect that the organization is fair in its conduct of formal procedures meaning there is a high amount of procedural justice (PJ) and supervisors will treat employees fairly (i.e.; a high amount of Perceived Supervisor Support or

PSS) (Eisenberger et al., 1986). These two elements aid in an employee's overall feeling that the company values them and supports their job role which is formally called Perceived Organizational Support (POS) (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This overall feeling, or POS, will in turn lead the employee to have an Affective Commitment (AC) to the organization and be less likely to engage in voluntary turnover behavior (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Without a high exchange ideology, a person will not care about organizational support because it will not be a part of that person's work expectations. In other words, high PSS and PJ help establish overall POS. The evaluation of reciprocity as important, exchange ideology, affects the way the employee responds to organizational support. When employees expect fair treatment and perceive the organization as supportive, they are more likely to form and affective commitment to the organization. A strong affective commitment to the organization will lead to lowered voluntary turnover. Procedural justice, perceived supervisor support, and perceived organizational support are all linked to high voluntary turnover as well because when they are not fulfilled, it is unlikely that an employee will feel obligated to stay with the present organization. This is exemplified by each of the variables being significantly related to AC. The conceptual model would look similar to Figure 1.

This study is concerned with overall perceptions of the organization as fair. POS will capture this without the aid of PJ or PSS because these two are contributing factors to it. When exchange ideology is high, perceptions of organizational support should be high and the reverse relationship will exist. Procedural justice and perceived supervisor support do not have to be examined in order to determine this

fact (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Also, they do not have to be examined to understand the connection between the AC, POS, voluntary turnover relationship and boredom, which was one of the primary foci of this study. Thus, the present study framework looked similar to Figure 2. High stress levels can lead to voluntary turnover but high levels of POS can attenuate this so that the stress levels have less impact on turnover behavior (Winnubust, 1993). However, when rating POS, aspects of the job that are extremely low in stress are not considered (Eisenberger et al., 1997).

Also, extremely low levels of stress (boredom) are related to an employee's voluntarily leaving an organization (Johns, Gutman, Dewald, & Nunn, 2001). This implies that raising levels of POS aids in voluntary turnover reduction if employees experience extremely high levels of stress (emotional exhaustion) but not when they experience extreme levels of boredom.

The proposed research was devoted to answering the question, "Do low levels of job stress weaken the POS, AC, turnover relationship."

The literature has repeatedly shown that affective commitment and perceived organizational support have a significant positive correlation (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al., 2002; LaMastro, 2001; Rhoads, 2001). The findings of this study should be congruent with the literature.

Hypothesis 1: Perceived organizational support will be positively related to affective commitment.

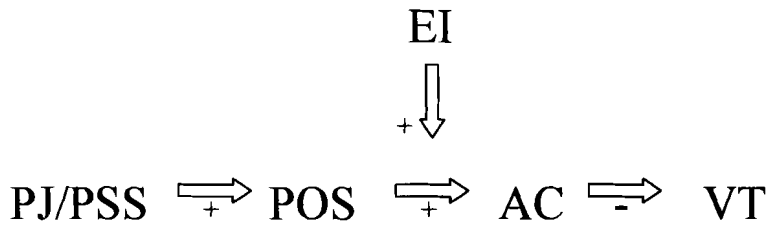


Figure 1. Suggested relationships among exchange ideology (EI), perceived organizational support (POS), affective commitment (AC), and voluntary turnover (VT) proposed by the literature. The model considers the role of procedural justice (PJ) and perceived supervisor support (PSS).

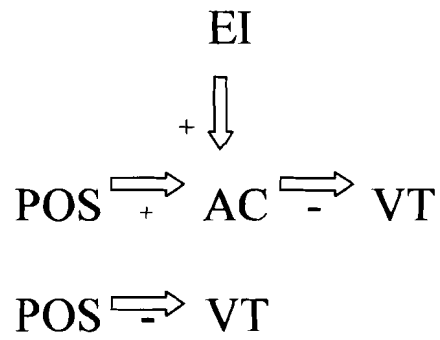


Figure 2. Suggested relationships among exchange ideology, perceived organizational support, affective commitment, and voluntary turnover proposed by the current research.

Perceived organizational support and affective commitment have been proven to have significant negative relationships with voluntary turnover behaviors (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al. 2002; Masterson et al., 2000; Randall & Meuller, 1995 Rhoades et al. 2001;). The findings of this study should be congruent with the findings of the majority of the literature.

Hypothesis 2a: Perceived organizational support will have a significant negative relationship to voluntary turnover.

Hypothesis 2b: Affective commitment will have a significant negative relationship to voluntary turnover.

Exchange ideology has been significantly related to variables that predict both voluntary turnover and perceived organizational support by Masterson et al. (2000). Exchange ideology has also been indirectly linked to commitment levels in past literature according to the same authors. Exchange ideology may impact employee perceptions and decision making when considering loyalty, leaving, and whether or not the organization care about their efforts and well being. This means that exchange ideology may be related to the perceived organizational support-affective commitment-turnover relationship in that exchange ideology may allow for the individual to care enough about organizational support to create affective commitment and remain with the company.

Hypothesis 3: Exchange ideology will moderate the relationship between perceived organizational support and affective commitment.

Stress levels have also been significantly related to voluntary turnover behaviors in past research studies such that high levels of stress, as detected by

emotional exhaustion, have been significantly positively related to voluntary turnover behaviors. Also, low levels of stress, as indicated by boredom, have been significantly positively related to voluntary turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 4: There will be a curvilinear relationship between stress and voluntary turnover in the shape of a U.

Research has shown that the relationship between perceived organizational support and turnover is strengthened by affective commitment and that affective commitment has a stronger relationship with voluntary turnover than perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Randall & Mueller, 1995; Rhoades et al., 2001). These relationships imply that affective commitment may be the key factor in the relationship among the three, in that without it, the perceived organizational support voluntary turnover relationship may not be significant. Thus, it has been concluded that affective commitment will mediate the relationship between perceived organizational support and voluntary turnover.

Hypothesis 5: The negative relationship between perceived organizational support and voluntary turnover will be mediated by affective commitment.

Perceived organizational support reduces the probability of voluntary turnover when employees experience emotional exhaustion (Winnubust, 1993) or when stress is not considered as a factor (Eisenberger et al., 2001). High perceived organizational support means a low amount of voluntary turnover behavior even when stress levels have reached emotional exhaustion or when they are at equilibrium stages (stress is not considered a problem factor). Boredom leads to a need to increase arousal possibly by leaving the situation regardless of perceived organizational support

(Eisenberger et al., 1997; Solomon & Corbit, 1974). This implies that if the job itself is boring, then perceptions that the organization values employees and cares about their well being may not be considered when employees contemplate withdrawal. Therefore it is logical to conclude that the relationship between perceived organizational support and voluntary turnover should be influenced by high and low levels of stress.

Hypothesis 6a: The relationship between voluntary turnover and perceived organizational support will be moderated by stress.

Hypothesis 6b: When stress is low, the relationship between perceived organizational support and voluntary turnover will be less significant than when stress levels are high.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

The major goal of this study was to test and interpret the relationship that exists among affective commitment, perceived organizational support, and voluntary turnover as influenced by boredom, or low levels of stress. Accurately testing stress levels was an important part of successfully accomplishing that goal. Stress in this study was viewed as a continuum from very low levels (boredom) to very high levels (emotional exhaustion). Emotional exhaustion, boredom, and general job satisfaction have all been measured separately in order to understand their impact on job related outcomes. However, a continuum scale including all three levels of stress was not found in the literature. Boredom and emotional exhaustion have a few overlapping concepts such as fatigue, related to emotional exhaustion, and becoming weary, related to boredom. It was imperative to this study that a scale measuring stress on a continuum be used to avoid complications. A continuum stress test was constructed and a pilot study performed for this reason.

Participants of Pilot Study

The 26 participants in the pilot study were college students enrolled in introductory or developmental psychology courses. To obtain a random sample, students were chosen on the basis of which of them signed the participation sheet in a location available to all students in introductory or developmental psychology. The test took them a maximum of 15 minutes to complete. The participants were 57% female, and over 80% were ages 17 to 21. Student workers accounted for 38.5% of the participants while 50% of the participants held entry-level jobs. The majority of

participants fell into the clerical/administrative (15.4%), customer service, (23.1%), or other non-specified job types (38.5%).

Instruments for Pilot Study

The statements on the stress evaluator were chosen on the basis of whether or not they could discriminate among participants who were emotionally exhausted, bored, or had an equilibrium stress state and are displayed in Appendix A. This was done by combining dimensions of boredom, general job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion. The statements were designed to measure stress as a continuum from boredom to emotional exhaustion. Each statement was expected to measure a single cause of a stressful reaction on all three levels. This meant that each causal factor had to be a part of all three levels of stress to keep the information strictly scientific. Statement 1 was designed to simply ask the participant if she or he was bored, emotionally exhausted, or experienced equilibrium amounts of stress at work. This question had a significant .73 correlation with the total score questions ($p < .001$). The other questions were to correlate significantly with Statement 1 to be considered for the actual study.

The causal factors for a stressful reaction were amount of intellectual stimulation, (from little thinking requirements to taxing amounts of problem solving) vigilance, (from little variety to little consistency), work load (from having relatively few tasks to perform to having to perform more tasks than is personally considered feasible), and monotony (from little to no change of scenery to sensory over stimulation). These were chosen

because they fit the previously described criteria, each one could measure all three levels of stress. Statements 2, 7, and 10 measured vigilance, statements 3, 6, and 9 measured intellectual stimulation, statements 4 and 8 measured task load, and statements 5 and 10 measured monotony. Correlations for all statements (except statement 9) ranged from .42 to .67 and were significant at the .05 level. The options for statement 9, “my job is not complex enough for me, I like the amount of complexity in my job, and the job is so complex that it is taxing” did not yield a statistically significant correlation with statement 1 (.32), thus statement 9 was not used in the experimental study.

Procedure for Pilot Study

Participants were to sign a participation sheet for the pilot study that indicated when and where the study was to take place. When the participants arrived at the specified time, they were given an informed consent form (Appendix B) explaining the study and the fact that their answers would be kept confidential. They were instructed to fold them in half and pass them forward. The researcher then read instructions for the pilot study (Appendix C) before passing out the demographic sheet (Appendix D) and list of statements. The participants were instructed to fill out the questionnaire according to their opinions concerning their own jobs and were asked to comment on their perception of the questions as valid, understandable, and/or repetitive. Each participant gave the researcher statement responses and demographic sheets.

Results of Pilot Study

All questions were correlated with question one and with each other to note a relationship with the general stress question and to note the relationships within each set of causal factors for stress. All questions were significantly correlated with the other questions on their respective categories except for Question 9 as previously mentioned. Participant comments indicated that there were no questions that needed to be modified or changed. The study showed that the questions were valid and appropriate to use for the actual study. However, the pilot study could not account for the perceptions of boredom based on working at the same organization for a prolonged period of time. Loyalty to an organization reduces the risk of voluntary turnover (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Randall & Mueller, 1995; Rhoades et al., 2001). Employees who have worked for their organization for longer periods of time may have done so out of loyalty; thus, this tenure may impact scores on affective commitment and voluntary turnover. The statements “I have worked at the current company for [specific duration]” and “I have worked in my current job type for [specific duration]” were added as questions 6a and 6b. The participants were given options under these questions to identify the amount of time they worked for the company and in that particular job type. The stress test results (Figure 3) for the experimental study show a distribution that indicates proper discrimination.

Participants of Experimental Study

Participants initially were chosen randomly from a hotel corporation operating throughout the United States. Three participants in the group responded within a period of two months thus participation from several other sources was sought.

Participants also came from a university in the mid-western part of the United States and a uniform company, a professional education sorority, and a high school in the southwestern part of the United States. There were 147 participants from the mid-western university and 94 participants from the Southwestern United States town with 185 women and 56 men. The typical participant was between the ages of 17 and 21 (29%) or 41 and 50 (21.2%). They held a fulltime (63%), first line management (24.5%), entry level (21.6%), or student job (20.7%) as an education/training/instructor (26.6%) or clerical/administrative (22.4%) worker. One hundred and twenty eight of the participants were working in their current job type for 4 years or less and for their organization for 4 years or less. A complete listing of the demographics is in Table 1.

Procedures for Experimental Study

Permission was obtained from Emporia State University through the Institutional Review Board (Appendix E) and from both a thesis committee and heads of the psychology department to conduct the study. All participants received an informed consent form (Appendix F), which described the research and its purpose briefly so that their signature on this form signified their understanding and willingness to comply with the study. Three applicants received an electronic version of the survey that required them to carefully read a statement of consent. Participation in the study was indication of consent for those participants in the electronic version of the survey. Each participant was instructed to carefully read the informed consent form as it included a brief explanation of the study. Those who received an electronic copy of the study and were instructed to send the information directly to the researcher.