

# **R E T E N T I O N**

## **RETENTION IN THE ARMED FORCES: PAST APPROACHES AND NEW RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

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## Retention in the Armed Forces: Past Approaches and New Research Directions

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The retention of highly qualified personnel is an issue that all organizations must continually address. The military is not exempt from this problem – in fact, retention of personnel may be a greater problem for the military than for civilian organizations due to the current economic prosperity of the United States and the low comparative pay for military positions. All employers, including the military, are concerned with employee retention for several reasons. First, high rates of employee turnover are quite costly. For example, organizations exert substantial financial resources searching for qualified applicants to fill vacant positions, and training new personnel is a costly endeavor. Furthermore, there are costs associated with the loss of productivity and readiness that can result from high levels of discontinuity in the workforce. Given these costs, it is expected that the subject of organizational retention has been the focus of a great deal of research, both within and outside of the military.

The purpose of this report is to provide a framework for future research on organizational retention and its inverse, turnover. Included is a historical overview of past

turnover models, as well as an in-depth examination of the current models that drive the research aimed at investigating the processes involved in job retention and turnover. The strengths, shortcomings, and utility of these models are discussed from both theoretical and pragmatic perspectives.

The first section of the review provides an overview of the general ways in which the military has studied retention, and includes examples of key findings within this body of literature. Following the discussion of the military's research, a number of different theoretical frameworks outlining the processes by which individuals leave organizations are reviewed in Section 2. Next, several general classes of social psychological theories related to group attachment and attitudes are discussed to supplement the reviewed military and organizational literature in Section 3. These broader psychological frameworks may help to further the understanding of the processes involved in individuals' decisions to stay or leave particular occupations or organizations. Finally, based on the literature reviewed, an integrated conceptual framework is offered as a tool to synthesize the extant literature and to guide future research on turnover and retention in Section 4.

# **S E C T I O N 1**

## **AN OVERVIEW OF RETENTION RESEARCH IN THE MILITARY**

## An Overview of Retention Research in the Military

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The issue of retention of military personnel has received a great deal of empirical attention. As a result, numerous reports have been generated that detail a number of the important factors found to be related to the retention plans and subsequent retention behavior of military personnel. It should be noted that the purpose of this review is not to detail or summarize the findings from this vast body of literature, but instead to discuss the different ways in which retention in the military has been examined empirically. The discussion of how military retention has been examined is important because it may be possible that weak methods have influenced the knowledge generated.

Research examining the retention behaviors of military personnel typically has been conducted in one of three ways. First, large-scale survey research has been conducted where the primary purpose was to investigate how numerous factors relate to or predict the retention behavior of military personnel. Second, in addition to identifying important factors related to the retention behaviors of

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military personnel, researchers have also invested a great deal of effort into the application of general principles from economic models of occupational choice to the study of military retention. Specifically, by applying these basic theoretical principles, researchers have been quite successful in developing a number of multivariate statistical models that can and have been used to predict the effects of large-scale policy changes on the retention behavior of military personnel.

Finally, specific conceptual models of military retention behavior that were proposed on the basis of theory have been evaluated.

This section of the review will outline key examples of these different approaches. A discussion of how methodologies employed by the military limit our ability to interpret this research will follow.

## Survey research and military retention

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Results from large-scale surveys of military personnel have commonly been used to descriptively analyze a host of factors associated with the intentions and behaviors of military personnel to remain in the military. A recent United States General Accounting Office (GAO) report of preliminary results from the Department of Defense (DoD) 1999 Survey of Active Duty Members (Rabkin, 2000) is a good example of the type of descriptive research on retention that results from such large-scale surveys. Included in this report was the finding that military members' overall satisfaction with military life appeared to be strongly linked to their likelihood of staying in the military. Specifically, 73% of members who reported being satisfied indicated that they were likely to stay in the military, whereas only 20% of dissatisfied personnel indicated that they were likely to stay. In addition to the descriptive relationship between satisfaction and intention to remain in the military, preliminary results from the recent GAO report detailed the top five factors that influenced military members decisions to stay or leave the armed services. With regard to retention, members reported that basic pay, job security, retirement pay, job enjoyment, and family medical care were the most important factors for staying or considering to stay in active duty; with regard to turnover, members reported that basic pay, amount of personal and family time, quality of leadership, job enjoyment, and deployments were the most important factors for leaving or considering to leave active duty.

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Another example of descriptive research on factors relating to the retention behavior of military members was reported by Simutis (1994). In this report, the survey findings demonstrated that military members' relationship status was an important factor that influenced retention. Specifically, members who reported being happily married were found to have the highest probability of remaining in the military. Another relationship factor found to influence retention was the congruence between military members' and spouses' satisfaction with military life, where retention was found to be highest among couples in which both the military member and spouse reported being satisfied. In this report, two other important factors

found to influence retention were the quality of the community and military members' utilization of community services. Specifically, military members who lived in higher quality communities, or reported higher levels of overall service utilization in their communities, were

**The results from the limited number of studies reviewed demonstrate the general point that a great deal of knowledge has been generated from large-scale surveys of military personnel.**

found to be the members who were most likely to stay in the military.

A final example with regard to large-scale surveys focuses on preliminary findings of Kocher and Thomas (2000). In this particular survey, marines were asked to respond to a number of questions concerning demographic characteristics and military background, satisfaction with numerous aspects of military work and

life, and perceptions of civilian employment opportunities. Preliminary findings from this survey overwhelmingly indicated that military pay and civilian career opportunities were the most influential factors related to marines' decisions to leave the military. In terms of factors beyond those of pay and civilian employment, the United States Marine Corp's pride and values were very influential factors in marines' decisions to stay in the military.

The results from the limited number of studies reviewed demonstrate the general point that a great deal of knowledge has been generated from large-scale surveys of military personnel. Some of this research has been mainly descriptive in nature, whereas other research has generated valuable knowledge concerning the factors that appear to be most influential in military members' decisions to stay or leave the armed services. While the general interest in studying factors that influence military members' retention behavior is a common feature that brings this large area of research together, there are important aspects of this line of research that hinder one's ability to make meaning of the vast amount of knowledge generated.

### Limitations of survey research

One of the most important limitations of this large-scale survey research is the absence of a general theoretical framework of retention behavior in which these findings can be interpreted. However, this does not imply that the large-scale retention survey studies lack theoretical underpinnings. In fact, the items contained in the 1999

United States Marine Corps Retention Survey were developed on the basis of some of the leading theories of employee turnover, such as Price and Muller's (1981) structural model of employee turnover, Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, and Meglino's (1979) expanded turnover process model, and Hom and Griffeth's (1991) most recent version of the turnover process model (Kocher & Thomas, 2000). What is meant by the absence of a general theoretical framework is that large-scale survey findings, such as those reviewed, typically are not placed within the context of theories on retention behavior. In the absence of such theoretical discussions, it is difficult to find a common ground on which these findings can be interpreted.

Additionally, without a general theoretical framework in which survey findings are interpreted, questions concerning how specific factors influence retention outcomes are difficult to address. For example, it is commonly understood that individuals' satisfaction with the military way of life is an important factor related to retention behavior. However, in the absence of a particular theory of retention, there is no framework that can be used to discuss how these two variables are in fact related. Furthermore, a common framework could be useful in guiding future research in terms of testing additional hypotheses concerning how these specific constructs are related to one another. In sum, the absence of such a framework in many large-scale survey studies on military retention makes interpretation of the findings very difficult and provides little direction for where future research should focus.

Another important factor that interferes with making meaning of the knowledge generated from large-scale surveys on military retention is the inequality of measurement that results when there is no general theoretical framework to guide research. To demonstrate this point, consider the prominent finding that key economic factors, such as pay and civilian employment alternatives, play an important role in the decisions that individuals make with regard to staying or leaving the military. In addition, consider that research has consistently demonstrated that individuals' satisfaction with military life is an important factor influencing retention. In the absence of a theoretical framework to guide the empirical investigation of these factors in relation to retention, it has been difficult to make

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meaning of the finding that satisfaction influences retention behavior. For example, findings from the 1999 United States Marine Corps Retention Survey demonstrated that dissatisfaction with military pay was the most dominant reason for why marines chose to leave the military (Kocher & Thomas, 2000). However, in the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Members (Rabkin, 2000), only global satisfaction was discussed with regard to the relationship between satisfaction and retention. Thus, because there has been little consistency with regard to how the construct of satisfaction has been measured, the question that is raised is whether or not global satisfaction with military service is merely a function of being satisfied with the pecuniary aspects of military life. However, if a common theoretical framework was employed to guide the survey research on military retention, the construct of satisfaction would be operationalized on the specific basis of the theory, which would result in more uniformed measurement of this construct across the large-scale surveys of military personnel.

In summary, the abundance of large-scale survey research that has examined factors related to retention in the military has been quite fruitful in that numerous factors have been identified. However, an overarching limitation of this research strategy is that little attention has been paid to the role of theory in carrying out, interpreting, and most importantly, integrating the large number of findings that have been borne from these surveys.

### **Multivariate economic models of occupational choice and military retention**

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Another common way in which retention in the military has been examined empirically is through the development of multivariate retention models based on the principles of general economic models of occupational choice (Hogan & Black, 1991). In short, the basic premise of these models is that rational individuals make their

occupational decisions in what has been termed a “utility maximizing” framework. With respect to military personnel, the utility maximizing framework implies that individuals seek to maximize utility by making a decision either to stay in the military or leave the military for the civilian sector. Utility in either the military or civilian sector is dependent upon the pecuniary and non-pecuniary factors associated with each. Pecuniary factors are those such as military pay and perceived earning opportunities in the civilian sector. Non-pecuniary factors are those associated with a particular occupational setting that do not directly relate to financial compensation, such as work hours, time away from home and family, preference for military service, and length of commute. Individuals seek to maximize utility by choosing the occupation in which the pecuniary and non-pecuniary benefits provide the highest level of actual and anticipated satisfaction (Hogan & Black, 1991; Mackin, Mairs, & Hogan, 1995; Warner & Goldberg, 1984).

One of the first multivariate models of retention behavior to be proposed on the basis of economic theory was the Annualized Cost of Leaving Model (ACOL). The basic premise of the ACOL model is that it compares the expected path of pecuniary and non-pecuniary returns of choosing to stay in the military versus the expected path of pecuniary and non-pecuniary returns of leaving the military immediately. If the expected path of staying in the military is greater than that expected by leaving immediately, individuals will choose to stay (Warner & Goldberg, 1984).

Since the initial development of the ACOL model, there have been at least two major refinements. These refinements have resulted in the development of the ACOL-2 model and the Stochastic Cost of Leaving model (Gotz & McCall, 1983). These more refined models represent a new class of multivariate models of military retention behavior, which have been termed the Dynamic Retention Models. The refinements of the initial ACOL have been

primarily statistical in nature and reflect the recognition of the problem of “unobserved heterogeneity,” which simply means that individuals differ by unobserved or unmeasured factors (Hogan & Black, 1991). The purpose here is simply to familiarize the reader with basic tenets and terminologies used when discussing these models, not to provide a statistical discussion of how key parameters are derived. After reviewing this basic information, how the military has used such models in the study of retention behavior can be discussed.

In general, the purpose of the multivariate models has been to help the military formulate policies concerning annual military pay raises, reenlistment bonuses, changes to the military retirement system, and changes to non-pecuniary job factors (Hogan & Black, 1991; Warner & Goldberg, 1984). In effect, once the model has been estimated for a specific population, specific pecuniary and non-pecuniary factors of interest can be entered into the retention equation and the effect of each factor on retention rates can be examined. An example of this approach can be found in the early work of Warner and Goldberg (1984) that examined the effects of what were considered to be the most salient non-pecuniary factor of navy life: the incidence of sea duty. After estimating the ACOL model, their results indicated that a higher incidence of sea duty was associated with lower level of first-term retention rates in the navy, regardless of the level of pay.

Thus, it could be concluded that additional policies leading to additional time at sea duty would have a negative effect on retention rates (Warner & Goldberg, 1984). A second example of the application of the ACOL model to studying military retention examined the relationship between Selective Reenlistment Bonuses (SRBs) and retention of Marine Corps enlisted personnel (Cymrot, 1987). This study found that small increases in SRBs were associated with increases of over 13% in reenlistments in certain sub-populations of marines, demonstrating the utility of the ACOL model in

predicting retention rates from selective changes in reenlistment bonuses.

### Limitations of multivariate model research

The use of multivariate models in the study of military retention can yield research findings that have direct

implications for policy; however, this approach to research has three important limitations. First, all of these models make the same assumption concerning the rationality of individual decision-making process. This assumption may be unfounded in that much of the time, individuals’ decision-making processes defy the premise of rational thought (Ruth, 1992; Sutherland, 1994). A second major limitation of the economic models is the rather crude identification of non-pecuniary factors. Although pecuniary factors are quite easy to identify and measure, non-pecuniary factors are not. As a consequence, all aspects of a particular job that are not related to monetary benefits are considered non-pecuniary. Little theoretical work has been accomplished in terms of specifying what the important non-pecuniary factors are, let alone how they will be measured and factored into the retention equation. The third major limitation of the economic models applied to the study of military retention also has to do with how non-pecuniary factors are conceptualized. Non-pecuniary factors have been conceptualized as “taste factors or monetary equivalents of the non-monetary aspects of military or civilian life” (Warner & Goldberg, 1984, p. 27). Implicit in this conceptualization of non-pecuniary factors is the assumption that non-monetary factors can be assigned a monetary value. This raises a question about the assignment of value to a specific non-pecuniary factor as the monetary value assigned may not accurately reflect individuals’ perceptions of non-monetary value. Therefore, some of the assumptions associated with the economic models that have been applied to the study of military retention appear to be flawed. Consequently, if the basic assumptions of the theory driving the research are not valid, the ability to interpret the knowledge generated from these studies can be a rather difficult process.

**The use of multivariate models in the study of military retention can yield research findings that have direct implications for policy; however, this approach to research has three important limitations.**

### Individual process models

The final method by which research generally has been conducted on military retention is through the proposal and empirical evaluation of specific conceptual models of retention behavior. A recent study by Kerr (1997) is representative of the research that has taken this approach to examine military retention. In this particular study, Kerr proposed a conceptual model of retention of first-term and

second-term enlisted marines in which the reenlistment outcome was understood to be a function of demographic characteristics, military experience, cognitive satisfaction with military life, and concerns over force reduction, as well as external factors such as alternative civilian job opportunities. To evaluate the model empirically, analyses were stratified by gender and enlistment, resulting in

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separate analyses for each of the following groups: (1) male, first-term marines; (2) female, first-term marines; (3) male, second-term marines; and (4) females, second-term marines. The results from the study demonstrated that many of the factors proposed were significant predictors of retention behavior, however, none of the factors analyzed were significant across all four groups.

These results suggest that the processes that lead marines to leave the service are somewhat different for first-term and second-term males and females. For example, one of the important factors predictive of first-term reenlistment behavior was whether or not service in the Marine Corps met first-term enlistees' expectations. For second-term marines, economic factors and civilian job alternatives were found to be important factors. While the original conceptual model proposed by Kerr (1997) did not postulate different pathways by which enlisted marines leave the service, the results that suggested so could have been used to refine the original conceptual model, which then could have guided future research efforts with greater precision.

### Limitations of individual process model research

As the study by Kerr (1997) demonstrates, one of the unfortunate limitations within this area of research on military retention is that the process between theory and research has not been iterative. While the exact reasons for this remain unclear, considering the source of many of these studies provides some level of insight. Specifically, the great majority of studies in which specific models of military retention have been proposed and empirically examined are in fact theses that have been completed at the Naval Postgraduate School. Given the transient nature of research conducted in fulfillment of educational requirements, it comes as little surprise that these initial studies have not led to more systematic programs of research on military retention. Another limitation plaguing research concerned with the empirical evaluation of

conceptual models is that little effort has been made to tie the findings from this body of work into a larger or more encompassing theoretical framework; this lack of research integration has presented a particular challenge for the current, comprehensive undertaking.

### Conclusions regarding the research on military retention

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The purpose of this brief review covering the literature on military retention was to discuss three general ways in which military retention has been empirically examined. Without question, there are likely to be some studies on military retention that fail to fit within one of the three general ways discussed. Nonetheless, it should be clear from the review thus far that studying military retention in a variety of ways has a profound impact on the ability to synthesize the generated knowledge. For example, as previously discussed, one of the major limitations of conducting large-scale surveys, as a means for studying military retention behavior, is that no theoretical framework has been offered in which the range of findings can be interpreted. With regard to the application of economic models to empirically examine military retention, the assumptions behind these models can be called into question. This, in turn, makes it difficult to draw valid conclusions from the knowledge generated from this line of research. Finally, while there have been a limited number of studies examining specific conceptual models of military retention, efforts to tie these findings into a more general theoretical framework have been relatively weak.

**Nonetheless, it should be clear from the review thus far that studying military retention in a variety of ways has a profound impact on the ability to synthesize the generated knowledge.**

When viewing the extant research on the topic of military retention as a whole, it appears that in their quest to identify the key factors associated with the problem of low retention rates, military researchers have lost sight of the important role of theory and process. Theory plays an instrumental role in quality research by guiding research toward parsimony; rather than attempting to examine all potential factors, it is most efficient to examine those specific factors that are believed to be most influential in shaping a particular outcome. Theory also provides a lens through which research findings can be interpreted, and directions for future research can be made. Related to theory is the matter of process. Process addresses not only the question

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of whether a particular factor is related to a specific outcome, but more importantly, it addresses the question of how a particular factor influences a specific outcome. By attempting to understand the process between a particular factor and a specific outcome, interventions can be more effectively developed as well. For example, by examining process it may be found that the nature of the relationship between job satisfaction and employee turnover is mediated by another distinct factor, such as individuals' levels of organizational commitment. Thus, in this case, the focus of intervention would be at the level

of improving individuals' organizational commitment. The purpose of the remainder of this review will be to discuss a number of theories on employee turnover, as well as to discuss how a number of psychological theories can complement the theoretical frameworks in which retention can be examined. Following this discussion will be the proposal of a theoretical model of employee turnover that can be used as a guide for future research on the subject of military retention, as well as a lens through which previous research on military retention can be interpreted and built upon.

# **S E C T I O N 2**

## **RETENTION AND TURNOVER THEORIES IN INDUSTRIAL-ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**

# Retention and Turnover Theories in Industrial-Organizational Psychology

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In determining the most state-of-the-art thinking about job retention in the field of industrial-organizational psychology, recent books (e.g., Hom & Griffeth, 1995) and journal articles (e.g., Chang, 1999), as well as more established works (e.g., Hulin, 1991), were examined. The collected works identified many theories of job retention and turnover, with several identifiable differences emerging from the theories that are significant to organizational research. In particular, four classes of theories emerged and will be discussed in succession: (1) rational theories; (2) multiple-path theories; (3) adaptation theories; and (4) commitment theories. These class categories are certainly not exclusive, as they each incorporate different characteristics of the identified theoretical models (i.e., one model could be categorized under more than one class of theory).

In this report, each theoretical model is delineated under the most appropriate class of theory, along with a critical analysis of the model. Following these delineations is a review of the important features to consider when developing a model of job retention. The section will conclude with a discussion of the implications this state-of-the-art theorizing and how it affects the study of military retention.

## Rational theories

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The majority of turnover theories can be defined as models of intentional decision-making processes. These theories look at the cognitive processes that people go through as they come to a conscious decision about whether or not to leave their job. This approach assumes that people are rational and go through decision-making processes that result in the behavioral outcomes of quitting. Theories that fit within this category include March and Simon's (1958) Theory of Organizational Equilibrium, Porter and Steers' (1973) Met Expectations Model, Mobley's (1977) and Mobley et al. (1979) Turnover Process Model, Steers and Mowday's (1981) Multi-route Model, and Lee and Mitchell's (1994) Unfolding Model. These are rational theories by nature, but will be discussed from the standpoint of their more defining feature of multiple paths.

## Theory of organizational equilibrium

March and Simon (1958) proposed a model of turnover based on economic theory. Paralleling the strife for equilibrium between supply and demand in economic theory, March and Simon contend that employees endeavor to maximize the rewards received from the job (i.e., outputs) in relation to their contributions to the job (i.e., inputs). The attitudinal responses people have toward their jobs are evaluated based on an input versus output ratio, with satisfaction occurring when outputs outweigh inputs; dissatisfaction is the result of the inputs prevailing over the outputs. This equilibrium is determined by two additional rational components; the perceived desirability of job movement and the perceived ease of leaving the current organization.

The first factor, the perceived desirability of job movement, depends on the current job alternatives available to the individual. Several factors influence whether an employee would like to move. For example, job satisfaction affects the desire to leave an organization. In addition, the size of the organization can influence one's desire to leave due to the potential for advancement within the organization. The second factor, the perceived ease of leaving the current organization, is also dependent on several elements. Economic conditions have a great impact on the opportunities that are visible to the individual (Steel, 1996). March and Simon (1958) posit that this is the most important predictor of turnover; the more jobs that are available, the easier it is to find a new position elsewhere. Other factors affecting the perceived ease of leaving an organization include location and visibility of the current organization, with more prestigious organizations providing greater credibility and more network contacts for individuals. Furthermore, extracurricular activities may facilitate the ease with which individuals can leave their jobs because these activities provide network contacts.

## Met expectations model

The Met Expectations Model posits a cognitive comparison. Rather than the flat input/output ratio, the comparison is between what one expects from the job and what one actually experiences on the job (Porter & Steers, 1973). In essence, satisfaction is reached when expectations are met, and dissatisfaction occurs when they are not. From this framework, the degree to which expectations are fulfilled leads to individuals' satisfaction levels, and satisfaction is an antecedent of retention and turnover.

The original theory hypothesized a linear relationship between expectations and satisfaction: as the discrepancy

becomes more negative (expectations being higher than experiences), dissatisfaction increases. Likewise, as the discrepancy approaches zero from the negative side and extends beyond, satisfaction increases. A contrasting view is inherent in Festinger's (1957) dissonance theory, which hypothesizes a curvilinear relationship, where satisfaction is greatest when expectations are met, but declines with an increasing absolute magnitude of the discrepancy

**The cognitive judgment regarding the degree to which expectations are met leads to either satisfaction or dissatisfaction.**

(Griffeth, 1981, as cited in Hom & Griffeth, 1995). For example, an employee receiving a greater salary than expected may feel undeserving of such a raise, and this might lead to dissatisfaction.

Although the Met Expectations Model is not currently used as a complete model of turnover, it is used to explain particular findings. For example, the success of realistic job previews (RJPs) can be explained using this theory.

Through RJPs, potential employees' expectations are adjusted via information presented by employers before they begin their jobs (Phillips, 1998). Several other mechanisms have been suggested for how RJPs work (Hom, Griffeth, Palich, & Bracker, 1998). One line of thinking is that prospective employees with higher expectations might decline the position upon the realization that the job subsumes their standards. The process also may induce a greater sense of commitment to the acceptance of the job because applicants have a greater sense of freedom to choose their situation given more information about what the job will really entail. Just as likely, defense mechanisms specific to particular difficulties of the job may be sparked, such as viewing a difficult job as a challenge rather than a stress. Also, certain values, such as the value of interesting and challenging work, may be activated. In each of these cases, turnover can be reduced through a measurable reduction of expectations (Hom et al., 1998).

### Turnover process model

Mobley (1977) introduced a heuristic model that describes the process of turnover, as well as new constructs involved in the process. In Mobley's model, the withdrawal decision process that leads to turnover is linear in that each stage affects the next stage. The process begins with a negative evaluation of one's current job, which is where the previously discussed theories leave off. The negative evaluation leads to dissatisfaction with the job, which in turn initiates thoughts of quitting. If the evaluation of the

utility of seeking out alternatives is greater than the utility of staying in the current job, a job search results. Once alternatives are encountered, the person evaluates and compares them to the current job; if an alternative is favored over the current job, the decision to quit is made.

The most important contribution of this model is the inclusion of the intermediate cognitive and behavioral processes involved in the satisfaction-turnover relationship. For example, important constructs such as the utility of job-seeking, the utility of staying, the job search, and the comparison between the current job and the possible alternatives are introduced. Previous models of job retention do not consider these intermediate processes, which may help to explain why these models lack the power to accurately predict turnover. However, Mobley's (1977) turnover process model has not been successful at predicting turnover either. This led to a revised model (Hom & Griffeth, 1991) that accounts for the decision to quit a job regardless of the alternatives available.

Similar to the previous model, Mobley et al. (1979) proposed that job satisfaction, expected utility of the present job, and expected utility of alternatives are the main antecedents of search and quit intentions, which in turn lead to turnover. In this case, however, these cognitive judgments are not required to develop in subsequent stages, and they have direct effects on the turnover behavior. In addition, non-work values (e.g., centrality of the job in comparison to other life domains) and responsibilities (e.g., family obligations) are identified as factors important to the prediction of search and quit intentions.

**The most important contribution of this model is the inclusion of the intermediate cognitive and behavioral processes involved in the satisfaction-turnover relationship.**

### Summary and evaluation

The first two theories discussed, the Theory of Organizational Equilibrium and the Met Expectations Model (March & Simon, 1958; Porter & Steers, 1973), focus on the particular factors or decisions that predict turnover, but do not address the cognitive processes involved. The Theory of Organizational Equilibrium (March & Simon, 1958) incorporates economic conditions that have been shown time and again to influence movement between jobs. For example, according to Steel's (1996) research, military members are more likely to leave when there are jobs available elsewhere, otherwise, they tend to stay in their current positions. One drawback of this organizational equilibrium theory is that it describes the cognitive

comparison that is made to determine whether or not someone is satisfied, but does not describe the behavioral and cognitive processes that go on after one has determined that he/she is dissatisfied. The Met Expectations Model (Porter & Steers, 1973) adds the factor of expectations that people hold about what they should or will receive on the job. Once again, however, this is only a comparison yielding a satisfied or dissatisfied response.

Mobley's Turnover Process Model incorporates new processes that describe the link between dissatisfaction and actually leaving the job, and identifies additional factors of non-work values and responsibilities that predict search and quit intentions.

**Differences between models include the object of the comparison and the causes of the comparison.**

These theories propose that a value judgment is made in comparing the current job position to either some standard (March & Simon, 1958; Porter & Steers, 1973) or to perceived or real alternatives to the present job (Mobley, 1977; Mobley et al., 1979). Differences between models include the object of the comparison and the causes of the comparison. Despite all of these differences, all of the rational theories suggest that people continuously assess their situations. As discussed below, Lee and Mitchell's (1994) theory emphasizes that only some people engage in this ongoing process.

## Multiple path theories

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Theories incorporating multiple paths allow people to come to the "quit decision" through different cognitive routes. Evidence has shown that there is more than one path to exit behavior (Lee & Mitchell, 1994); different people arrive at the same outcome through different means. The primary research team promoting this perspective is comprised of Lee, Mitchell, and their colleagues (Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, & Hill, 1999; Lee, Mitchell, Wise, & Fireman, 1996).

### Unfolding model

Lee and Mitchell (1994) posit that employees make comparisons between their self-concepts and their current jobs. They assume that some people assess their job constantly, whereas others do so only when they are 'shocked' into a cognitive analysis. According to Lee and Mitchell (1994, p. 60), "A shock to the system is hypothesized to be a very distinguishable event that jars employees toward deliberate judgments about their jobs and,

perhaps, to voluntarily quit their job." Examples of such "shocks" might include a change in the organization (e.g., a new management structure) or a change in family status (e.g., a new baby in the family). The shock instigates a conscious judgement on the fit between the job and the worker's image. If there is a poor fit, a job search and subsequent comparison between the potential alternatives and the self-image will ensue (Lee & Mitchell, 1994).

Once an individual begins to question his or her current job situation, a decision process is initiated. There are four decision paths by which individuals can decide to quit their jobs. The first path is script driven. If a similar situation has occurred in the past, the person will mimic the his/her previous decision and has no need for further processing on how to respond. If there is no script for the situation, a second path is taken. In this path, employees decide if they are committed to staying with the organization by asking whether the organization fits with their own individual values and image. If their self-image does not fit with the organization, they will quit. A third path is engaged if there is no commitment to the organization. In this case, possible job alternatives are evaluated with respect to one's personal image. If an alternative fits with an employee's personal image better than the current job, the employee will quit to pursue this alternative. The fourth path is not in response to a shock, but rather pursued as a routine assessment of the fit between the current position and the individual's personal image. If the current job or organization no longer fits the employee's values, he or she will evaluate other options (i.e., alternatives) and compare those to the current job. If an alternative is more attractive than the current organization, the employee quits. Lee and colleagues (Lee, Mitchell, Wise, & Fireman, 1996) add an additional route to this path where the employee does not search for alternatives.

**The shock instigates a conscious judgement on whether or not the job fits the worker's image.**

In a revision to the original Lee and Mitchell (1994) model, Lee and colleagues (Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, & Hill, 1999) propose that scripts may occur in more than the first path but cannot be engaged and acted upon. In addition, job alternatives in the new model incorporate non-work options, such as the marginal workforce (i.e., those individuals who are not economically obligated to work, but may do so as a secondary household income) identified by Hulin, Roznowski, and Hachiya (1985). Furthermore, job offers may act as a shock to the system, thereby initiating either the first or third path.

## Multi-route model

Drawing on the strengths of previous rational models of turnover, Steers and Mowday (1981) propose their Multi-Route Model. This model outlines a three-stage cognitive process, with each segment influenced by factors such as non-work activities, economic conditions, expectations, individual characteristics, and alternative responses. The

This model outlines a three-stage cognitive process, with each segment influenced by factors such as non-work influences, economic conditions, expectations, individual characteristics, and alternative responses.

stages include cognitive routes between: (1) job expectations and job attitudes; (2) job attitudes and intent to leave; and (3) intent to leave, alternative withdrawal behaviors, and actual turnover. Job expectations are influenced by individual characteristics, information about the job that is available at the time (e.g., number of business trips in a year employees typically take), and the available alternative job opportunities.

This model also includes the impact that economic conditions have on job expectations, which thereby influence job attitudes.

Subsequently, unpleasant affect toward the job can initiate efforts to change the current situation. If job change efforts do not yield satisfactory results, individuals will engage in further processing that could lead to the decision to quit. Intent to leave is influenced by both job affect and non-work variables, with non-work variables including such things as career development, limitations to geographical region, non-centrality of work/life values, and family considerations. These non-work influences are important in the decision to stay or leave.

## Other theories accounting for multiple paths

Although Lee and Mitchell's (1994) Unfolding Model is the most recent and widely cited theory of multiple paths, earlier rational models also accounted for multiple paths. As previously mentioned, Hom and Griffeth's (1991) revision of Mobley's (1977) model allows for a quit decision without a search for alternatives. Steers and Mowday (1981) also recognize several ways of arriving at the outcome of a quit decision.

## Summary and evaluation

Based on Lee and Mitchell's (Lee et al., 1999; Lee et al., 1996) studies and theorizing, employees who quit their jobs do not follow one prescribed path. Studies of

turnover in both accounting firms and hospitals suggest that people follow different routes in their decisions to quit (Lee et al., 1999; Lee et al., 1996). In one study, 92.6% of those who had quit fit into one of the categories described by the model (Lee et al., 1999). In these studies, the revised Unfolding Model was a better predictor of turnover than the original model. It accounted for more options in the stay/leave decision process. Despite the ability of the Unfolding Model to classify employees who leave their jobs into various categories, there has not been a successful way to determine who will take which route.

Like the Theory of Organizational Equilibrium (March & Simon, 1958), the Multi-Route Model (Steers & Mowday, 1981) explicitly incorporates economic factors as well as non-work influences and job performance. This theory recognizes that different people will be influenced by different factors when deciding to stay or leave, including how to deal with dissatisfaction. Some will try to change the work situation while others will decide to leave immediately. Although modes of influence are recognized, it does not specify how these modes actually influence the process, thereby making turnover predictions difficult. In fact, studies have failed to provide good support for this theory (Lee & Mowday, 1987). An historical review of turnover research reveals the complexities involved in the turnover process.

## Organizational adaptation theories

For various reasons, not all individuals can or want to leave their jobs, even when they are dissatisfied. Organizational adaptation theories hypothesize that employees go through an adaptation process whereby they adjust their behavior based on their attitude. Hulin et al. (1985) suggest several potential responses to negative job affect. One such response is to engage in work withdrawal behaviors. Examples of work withdrawal behaviors include absenteeism, tardiness, and decreased task effort. These alternative withdrawal responses can be viewed either as a continuum from mild to severe (e.g., tardiness as compared to quitting), or as compensatory (i.e., using sick days in lieu of quitting). Perhaps a more constructive reaction to dissatisfaction is to actively change the current work situation rather than seeking these maladaptive alternatives.

Research concerning the manifestation of withdrawal behaviors does not make it clear as to which of the models (progression versus compensatory) provides the more accurate representation of reality. For example, Krausz, Koslowsky, and Eiser (1998) found tardiness and

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It has become more evident that there is not  
one answer to the question,  
“Why, or how, do people quit their jobs?”

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absences to be significant predictors of employee turnover two years prior to the employees' departures. Although these authors suggest this finding supports the progression of withdrawal theory, it can also be interpreted from the compensatory perspective. There are some behaviors that employees can use for a certain amount of time before they become ineffective, such as calling in sick. Results from Krausz et al. (1998) indicated that employees who were absent often were not happy with their jobs, and therefore may later turn to a new behavior: quitting.

In sum, organizational adaptation theories posit that unhappy employees are more likely to engage in one or several of a variety of withdrawal behaviors, and these withdrawal behaviors are antecedents to the decision to leave an organization. Thus, it may be important to look at withdrawal behaviors as a complete set of behaviors rather than only focusing on the decision to remain or quit. Withdrawal behaviors, as a set, constitute a class of responses to a job, with employees engaging in any one of a number of potential adaptive responses to the work situation (including quitting). One important reason for studying a set of withdrawal behaviors is the very nature of turnover behavior; because it is a low base-rate, binary behavior (i.e., stay or leave), it is difficult to study and findings are potentially misleading. The following models explain turnover as part of the adaptation process.

### Cusp catastrophe model

Sheridan and Abelson (1983) used the concept of "withdrawal progression" to develop the Cusp Catastrophe Model. These theorists propose that a decision to remain in or leave an organization is made, though it is not necessarily a rational decision as presented in the rational theories. The decision to remain in or leave an organization is based on the levels of both job tension and commitment, and it results in a sudden change in the amount and extremity of employees' withdrawal behaviors (rather than a simple linear relationship between commitment and withdrawal behaviors).

The Cusp Catastrophe Model proposes that both job tension (i.e., work-related stressors such as role ambiguity or long work hours) and organizational commitment lead to turnover decisions. Contrary to other turnover models that incorporate the construct of organizational commitment, where satisfaction is a precursor to commitment, this model views *commitment* as a precursor to *satisfaction*. Thus, an assumption of this model is that employees are initially committed to their organization and will try to keep their job as long as possible, thereby avoiding the extra effort needed to search for and make a job change.

The Cusp Catastrophe Model also stresses the importance of withdrawal behaviors as progressive phenomena that occur on a spectrum from mild (e.g., daydreaming) to extreme (e.g., quitting) and result from either increased tension or decreased satisfaction. The theory hypothesizes that when the ratio of stress to commitment is above a personal threshold, the individual will make the decision to leave, and that this decision will lead to an abrupt change (i.e. sudden increase) in the withdrawal behavior exhibited. Unlike other models that conceptualize the turnover decision as an ongoing event, the Cusp Catastrophe Model posits that turnover decisions abruptly shift the attitude of the employee from being committed to staying, to being committed to leaving.

### Adaptive response model

The Adaptive Response Model (ARM) of withdrawal behavior (Griffeth, Gaertner, & Sager, 1999) has extended the Cusp Catastrophe Model in identifying four different types of employees based on the levels (low or high) of both commitment and job involvement. Although job involvement is different than tension, the concept of involvement can be linked to tension in that those who have high job involvement (i.e., work is a central part of their lives) will experience higher tension in response to an organizational stressor. Each type is expected to react differently to a given organizational stressor. Converging

on the same conclusion as the Cusp Catastrophe Model, the ARM suggests that those who have high job involvement and low commitment will be most likely to leave the organization.

### Labor-economic model

The Labor-Economic Model (Hulin et al., 1985) takes the concept of withdrawal behavior one step further than the Cusp Catastrophe Model by suggesting two additional responses to job dissatisfaction: (1) the reduction of job inputs through either psychological or behavioral withdrawal; and (2) the attempt to change the situation

**The Cusp Catastrophe Model proposes that both job tension and organizational commitment lead to turnover decisions.**

through a change in particular behaviors (e.g., joining a union). Categorizing responses in this manner allows for withdrawal to be incorporated into an adaptational view of organizational behavior, so that turnover behavior is not looked at strictly by itself.

This model expands upon past theories of turnover by recognizing the existence of different types of

workforces that will tend to react differently to dissatisfaction. It distinguishes between primary and marginal workforces. A primary workforce (i.e., those working as the primary source of income for themselves or their families) is more likely to remain at the job by trying to change aspects that are dissatisfying. A marginal workforce (i.e. those working second jobs or who are the second wage-earner of the family) is less likely to put effort into saving the job and therefore more likely to quit; not working is a feasible alternative for these individuals.

### Other models

Some of the rational theories mentioned above also incorporate the adaptational idea of withdrawal behavior. For example, Mobley et al.'s (1979) Turnover Process Model recognizes that employment contracts may prevent people from being able to leave when they otherwise would do so. One likely behavioral outcome stemming from these constraints is the display of alternative withdrawal behaviors. In this case, alternative withdrawal behaviors compensate for the prevented leave behavior. Steers and Mowday's (1981) Multi-route Model also incorporates alternative withdrawal behaviors in two ways. First, dissatisfied employees may attempt to change the current situation before they search for outside alternatives; if attempts to change the situation fail, a decision will be made about whether to leave. If a quit decision is

decided upon, a job search will ensue; if no acceptable alternatives are found, employees may engage in other forms of withdrawal or accommodation. Withdrawal behaviors allow employees to release anger or frustration, whereas accommodation efforts change the mental perspective that one has, thereby changing expectations and resulting in more positive affective responses.

### Summary and evaluation

These models depict a withdrawal or adjustment process for both remaining in and leaving an organization. Some of these theories addressing adaptation (e.g., Hulin et al., 1985; Sheridan & Abelson, 1983; Steers & Mowday, 1981) assume that individuals are committed to their organizations and prefer to remain within them, whereas others (e.g., Mobley et al., 1979) view withdrawal behavior as a response to a constrained situation in which a person cannot leave.

Progressive perspectives (Sheridan & Abelson, 1983) view turnover as a process of distancing oneself from an organization when dissatisfied, where "quitting" is the ultimate distance. The compensatory perspective sees alternative behaviors as a substitute for quitting, whereby employees may display any number of withdrawal behaviors as an result of dissatisfaction. In either case, this type of theory suggests that turnover does not exist in a vacuum; it holds that turnover responses are related to other behaviors, and research supports this conclusion (Scott & Taylor, 1985). This is an important concept in the study of turnover behavior. Moreover, exclusively looking at the leave/stay decision is difficult from a pragmatic standpoint because the number of employees who leave in any given interval is low; this renders typical statistical methods powerless.

**This model expands upon past theories of turnover by recognizing the existence of different types of workforces that will tend to react differently to dissatisfaction.**

An important distinction between the Cusp Catastrophe Model and other models of withdrawal behavior is that the former suggests a *nonlinear* relationship between the causes of dissatisfaction and withdrawal behaviors. Research appears to support this hypothesis (Sheridan, 1985).

Although the Labor-Economic Model does not attend to this issue, it suggests that different work forces will exhibit differing degrees of commitment, which in turn, lead to differing likelihoods quitting. This is similar to the

Cusp Catastrophe idea that those with less commitment will be more likely to make the 'quit' decision. The Labor-Economic Model also offers alternatives to the common withdrawal behaviors (i.e., absenteeism and tardiness); as we have seen in the evidence for the multiple path models, people do not always choose the same behaviors (Lee et al., 1999; Lee et al., 1996). Overall, the adaptation models offer important ideas to the study of employee turnover.

## Theories of organizational commitment

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Another perspective that primarily focuses on the positive characteristics of a job is the idea of attraction to an organization. Job attraction ties into many of the previous theories through organizational commitment (i.e., intention to stay), which is proposed to be the direct precursor to quitting. However, since turnover theorists are concerned with employees leaving the organization, they rarely ask the question, "What makes an employee stay?"

### Commitment model

The dominant theory of organizational commitment represents the construct as having three distinct dimensions: affective, continuance, and normative (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment describes one's affective orientation towards the organization. Items assessing affective attachment include a willingness to exert effort for the organization, acceptance of organizational values, and desire to remain in the organization. This is distinct from job satisfaction in that the target is the organization rather than the job (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989). Continuance commitment (also referred to as "calculative commitment") is the desire to stay due to the costs that would be incurred if the employee were to leave. Measurement of continuance commitment sometimes uses the level of inducements necessary to pull a person away from his or her current job. The third commitment dimension, normative commitment, refers to staying with the organization because of an obligation. This retention could be a result of the desire to continue with a decision that was previously made (i.e., acceptance of the job), or the desire to be doing what is best for the company (i.e., it will cost the company to search for and hire a new employee to fill that position).

Although these three dimensions are generally accepted, the model has been expanded to include additional factors. In particular, several researchers have found evidence that continuance commitment may have two dimensions: high sacrifice (i.e., leaving the organization would require a high level of personal sacrifice) and low

alternatives (i.e., a lack of acceptable alternatives outside the organization) (Jaros, 1997; McGee & Ford, 1987, as cited in Meyer et al., 1989).

Although the distinction is recognized, the three original dimensions are most often used.

It is important to distinguish between the types of commitment because each of them may have different antecedents as well as divergent effects on people's behavior (Jaros, 1997; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1989). Meyer and Allen (1991) propose different antecedents for each of the dimensions. More specifically, they hypothesize that affective commitment is formed through work experiences and personal characteristics; continuance commitment has a cognitive formation through investments and available alternatives; and normative commitment is influenced by social norms and organizational investments.

**The dominant theory of organizational commitment represents the construct as having three distinct dimensions: affective, continuance, and normative**

In a meta-analysis of studies available at the time, Mathieu and Zajac (1990) did find differences between affective and continuance commitment in terms of both proposed antecedents and outcomes: Job satisfaction has a much higher correlation with affective commitment than with continuance commitment; affective commitment is found to have a higher correlation with turnover intention than actual turnover (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). This indicates that compared to affective commitment, continuance commitment may have a greater incremental influence on actual turnover behavior above and beyond the influence of turnover intentions. In addition, career commitment has been investigated as a moderator of the organizational commitment–turnover intention relationship. Evidence supports the idea that as career commitment increases, the relationship between affective attachment and turnover is stronger (Chang, 1999). For example, an individual who is strongly committed to his or her career would be more likely to leave the organization as a result of negative affect towards the organization than an individual who has low career commitment. In essence, those who are strongly tied to their career will do more to keep it a pleasant part of their lives. Although not all forms of commitment are examined in Mathieu and Zajac's (1990) meta-analysis, the results highlighted the importance of considering that there are different types of commitment in turnover research.

## Structural model

Price (1977; Price & Mueller, 1981) posits a two-factor model of commitment as the proximal determinant of turnover, acting to mediate the influence of satisfaction on turnover. In other words, satisfaction is hypothesized to influence turnover behavior through its impact on intention to stay or commitment. This structural model provides an extensive list of factors thought to influence satisfaction and commitment. Factors directly influencing the intent to stay in an organization include professionalism (e.g., sense of duty to the job), kinship responsibility (e.g., family obligation) and generalized training. These factors, according to March and Simon, (cf. Theory of Organizational Equilibrium, 1958) increase the ease of finding alternative jobs. In addition, Price and Mueller (1981) identify a range of factors that influence satisfaction, including an organizational structure that allows for

employee participation, routinization of the job (e.g., boredom caused by repetitiveness), distributive justice (i.e., perceptions that rewards are dispersed fairly), and promotional opportunities. Satisfaction, therefore, increases commitment; commitment, in turn, increases the probability that employees will stay.

According to the model, commitment is determined by three factors: job satisfaction, job investments, and work alternatives.

## Investment model

Based on social exchange and interdependence theories (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), Farrell and Rusbult (1981) propose the investment model to describe processes that influence turnover. The goal of the model is to identify the antecedents of organizational commitment, which in turn are believed to be the direct predictors of turnover. According to the model, commitment is determined by three factors: job satisfaction, job investments, and work alternatives.

Job satisfaction is a function of a comparison between the outcomes one experiences from the job (defined as the difference between the rewards received and the contributions put toward the job) and the comparison level (CL),

or internal standards regarding what constitutes acceptable outcomes (i.e., expectations of what outcomes should be experienced). From this view, satisfaction occurs when the outcomes experienced outweigh the CL, and dissatisfaction occurs when outcomes fall short of expectations. The second factor, job investments, are the irretrievable resources tied to the job that would be lost if the individual were to quit; job investments act to promote stability and increase job commitment. Investments may be abstract (e.g., self-concept associated with the job) or tangible (e.g., military housing provided to service people); and direct (i.e., those things specifically tied to the job, such as a pension plan or the many years that one has dedicated to the service) or indirect (i.e., those things tangentially associated with the job, such as the friends made while in the military). The third factor, the value of work alternatives, is the degree to which perceived outcomes of alternative jobs outweigh those of the current job. Whereas investments and satisfaction act to promote commitment, alternatives weaken the commitment.

## Summary and evaluation

Attachment to an organization refers to the process of retention, rather than turnover. The Commitment Model lacks process, but otherwise provides additional information to be applied to other models. More than anything it provides a clear definition of "commitment" by distinguishing between different types of commitment, a concept that is used quite often in other models (Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Sheridan & Abelson, 1983).

Acknowledging different types of commitment brings a fresh light to theories that only refer to commitment as "intent to leave," and provides suggestions about where to look for the antecedents and consequences of these concepts. The Structural Model (Price, 1977; Price & Mueller, 1981) goes beyond merely adding an explicit list of antecedents of satisfaction and commitment. This model posits that some antecedents of commitment are not directed through satisfaction (e.g., non-work influences, training, and professionalism), and these antecedents, unlike many organizational circumstances

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Satisfaction is hypothesized to influence turnover behavior through its impact on intention to stay or commitment.

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and experiences, are recognized as important factors in predicting turnover or retention behavior. The Investment Model provides a parsimonious structure to use for understanding employee turnover. From this model, employees stay because they are happy, have invested resources, and do not perceive the availability of other employment alternatives. These three conditions lead to organizational commitment.

Many turnover theorists have included the idea of investment or commitment in one form or another. In Mobley's (1977) Turnover Process Model, for example, the term "cost of quitting" is synonymous with that of "investments" in that they both refer to those irretrievable resources that would be lost upon leaving an organization. Likewise, March and Simon's (1958) Theory of Organizational Equilibrium includes the concept of investment within their idea of available alternatives – sunk costs such as the number of years with a company are manifest in benefits such as pension plans, vacation days, etc., that will rarely be comparable in a new position. The influence of investment and commitment on the development of previous models clearly reveals that many researchers were implicitly aware of the importance of these concepts.

## Implications of industrial-organizational theories for examining military retention

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The numerous theoretical models from industrial-organizational psychology discussed above each contribute to understanding the process of turnover and retention through their emphasis of key features thought to influence the process. A discussion of these features as they relate to the current effort of developing a theoretical model of military retention will now proceed.

### Rationality

As we have seen from the work including multiple paths, strictly rational theories may not be the best means by which to characterize employees' quit decisions. Not all people are rational all of the time; thus, a good model needs to account for those who quit based on an affective response to their work (or non-work) environment.

A few theories, or certain components of theories, complement the cognitive perspective that quitting is a reactive or emotional process. Instead of viewing people as consistently rational, this perspective assumes that people can react directly to emotions. Theories along these lines are rare, but the Cusp Catastrophe Model

(Sheridan & Abelson, 1983) could be described as such a theory. This theory suggests that when stress exceeds commitment, it is no longer held in check by commitment, resulting in a sudden increase in withdrawal behaviors that may include quitting.

Lee and Mitchell (1994) suggest that people may use a scripted behavior to come to the decision to quit their job. Although this assumes people use little cognitive effort, it is not the same as quitting from a direct reaction to affect. Hulin et al. (1985) suggest that this reactive behavior may be found more often in marginal working populations. In these cases, employees are not pressured by economic factors to work and they can afford to spontaneously quit their job. Regardless, there are some people who quit their jobs as a reactive measure to an affective experience, and this needs to be accounted for by models of turnover behavior.

Considering military personnel, affective reactions that result in quitting are more likely to occur at the officer level where the member is not tied to a contract. Based only on speculation, it is possible that a written agreement requiring an employee to stay may promote rational decision-making. On the other hand, officers are typically more educated than non-officers and may be more likely to engage in rational thinking, as a result.

### Investments

Although the addition of investments to a turnover model is justified by the research findings, (e.g., Farrell & Rusbult, 1981) the Investment Model does not include other important constructs known to be involved in the turnover process (Hulin, 1991). In particular, job searching and other behaviors, such as efforts to improve the current position and alternative withdrawal behaviors, are not included.

The assumption that employees would rather stay in their current job than change to a new job, as found in withdrawal theories, also should be examined in turnover theories. Any employee comparing the current job to the available alternatives would weigh the cost of leaving. March and Simon (1958) discuss the idea in terms of the ease of leaving the current organization, and Mobley (1977) includes it in the utility of staying. For Farrell and Rusbult (1981), all the energy of searching for and starting a new job is part of the investment made to the current organization.

**Attachment to an organization refers to the process of retention, rather than turnover.**

In the military, investments are often an incentive to stay. Institutionalized contract periods are likely to force larger investments to be made than might otherwise be the case. After two duty periods, a military member is nearing the halfway point to military retirement tenure and the benefits that result. Furthermore, the more time one serves, the more intertwined one becomes with the military

lifestyle; the resulting self-concept is likely to spur retention as an investment. Additionally, military members make many friends and contacts throughout their time in the service who would be lost upon leaving.

**There is clearly more than one route to quitting a job, however, there must be a limit on the number of paths proposed within a model of turnover.**

### Multiple paths

There is clearly more than one route to quitting a job. This observance was borne out statistically when Lee, Mitchell, Holtom,

McDaniel, and Hill (1999) found that a model featuring additional paths fit the data better than their original, more parsimonious model. However, it is recognized that even this model does not fit all decision-making behaviors.

This result is due largely to the individual differences among military members in how they arrive at the decision to leave the military. Not all of these differences can be taken into account in a model of turnover, as a limit must be placed on the number of paths proposed within such a model. It becomes important to distinguish among the *principle* paths that people take to arrive at the decision to leave the military. For instance, some people have non-work influences pulling them away, whereas others have lost their sense of identity as a “military person” or simply have been offered better pay and benefits elsewhere. If interventions are to be successful, they must cover all major routes of job departure.

### Economic conditions

Economic conditions are explicitly or implicitly taken into account in many theories and they affect retention in either direct or indirect ways. The military models discussed earlier (e.g., economic models), as well as Muchinsky and Morrow (1980) view economic conditions as operating in a direct manner. According to this perspective, the economy acts as a valve for dissatisfaction to manifest itself in turnover. In simple terms, if employees are dissatisfied, then they will leave their jobs when others are available. Similarly, military models show that when times are bad (i.e., there is a paucity of available civilian jobs), members do not tend to leave their jobs.

On the other hand, economic conditions can have an indirect effect on the retention decision. Many theories look at the indirect effect that economic conditions have on perceptions and expectations of the current job (e.g., Porter & Steers, 1973; Steers & Mowday, 1981) or the comparison between the current job and available alternatives (e.g., Farrell & Rusbult, 1981; Hulin et al., 1985; March & Simon, 1958; Mobley, 1977). Economic conditions can also influence military members’ frames of reference for evaluating job inputs and job outcomes; in good economic times, inputs are more valued and outcomes are discounted because of what is available elsewhere (see Hulin, 1991). The perspective that economic conditions indirectly affect retention is missing in the current military models of turnover. Recognizing that expectations and perceptions of the military change with changes in economic conditions can be important. Employees may construe their current job as less desirable when appealing outside alternatives are available. Furthermore, as current military models of retention have found, economic conditions directly affect decisions to stay or leave. During times of economic prosperity, even satisfied military members may opt out of renewing their contract to pursue job alternatives outside of the military (Steel, 1996). This job switching during times of economic prosperity is found throughout the non-military environment as well (Hulin, 1991).

### Non-work influences

Early theories of turnover also fail to consider non-work influences, or circumstances not specifically related to one’s employment, (e.g. being tied to a specific geographic location due to a spouse’s job, having a large savings accumulated, or needing flexible hours. Some theorists would cite this absence as problematic. In fact, Lee and Mitchell (1994) suggest that a change in one’s non-work life can be the shock necessary to lead to a quit decision. Those individuals with commitments outside of their own personal needs (e.g., those with family obligations) may be more likely to incorporate these non-work factors when deciding to stay or leave current jobs. Greenhaus and colleagues (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Collins, in press) have emphasized the importance of social identity in the strength of non-work predictors, similar to Lee and Mitchell’s ‘self image.’ Greenhaus et al. (in press) found that the level of career identity interacted with work-family conflict – those with high career involvement were less likely to leave their profession if there was work-family conflict than those

**Military members are not immune to the influence of non-work factors.**

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Due to the contracts of military members, there is more concern of alternative withdrawal behaviors expressing themselves than in other organizations.

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who were relatively uninvolved in their careers. This result corresponds to the findings that were found with career commitment by Chang (1999).

Military members are not immune to the influence of non-work factors. Spouses and family members have needs and desires that influence employment decisions of the military members. With the permanent changes of station and "leaves" inherent in military life, outside relationships can become strained. As a result, non-work influences on job turnover may be more prominent in military families than in non-military families. A common problem the military continues to face is securing spousal employment. Strong conflict can arise as a result of a spouse who cannot find a well-paying job or has to stay home with the children because childcare costs are too high. As previously discussed, career identity can lessen the effect of non-work influences on employees' decisions to quit. Thus, those who perceive themselves as military men or women are less likely to allow outside factors to influence their decision to stay or leave the military. Although the military branches have responded, it is imperative for this pinnacle issue to be made explicit in any model of military retention.

### **Withdrawal behaviors**

As noted earlier quitting one's job is not the only response to the antecedents that lead to such behavior. In order to better understand the processes that go on, it is important and more convenient (due to time and resources) to look at an expansion of potential withdrawal behaviors; absenteeism, tardiness, and extra time away from the desk are only a few of the many possible withdrawal behaviors to study. Due to the contracts of military members, there is more concern of alternative withdrawal behaviors expressing themselves than in other organizations. As suggested in the Turnover Process Model (Mobley et al., 1979), employment contracts will keep a person in the organization, but increase the possible manifestation of alternative behaviors as a release for dissatisfaction with the job. Those who have made the decision to leave at the end of their terms but are held within the military until their contract expires are more likely to exhibit alternative withdrawal behaviors, according to nearly all of the organizational withdrawal models (e.g., Hulin et al., 1985; Cusp Catastrophe Model).

# **S E C T I O N 3**

## **APPLICATION OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES**

# Application of Social Psychological Theories to Better Understand Job Retention

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To best understand the previously discussed military and industrial/organizational models of organizational retention, it is necessary to examine how these models can be integrated within the framework of broader psychological theories. At the core of this perspective is the notion that psychological processes (rather than simple demographic or economic descriptors), and the variables related to

**At the core of this perspective is the notion that psychological processes (rather than simple demographic or economic descriptors), and the variables related to these processes, must be investigated.**

these processes, must be investigated. For instance, it is not age, gender, or socioeconomic conditions that are the proximal determinants of decisions to stay or leave an organization; rather, these demographic variables may be associated with consistent psychological processes that lead to behaviors related to one's connection to the organization. Understanding these processes will prove to be most fruitful if the goal is to predict behavior. Thus, other variables may be significant in understanding the processes related to organizational retention (either as independent factors, or mediated by

commitment or satisfaction). These other factors are best discussed within the broader framework of social psychological theories. Some of these conceptualizations are evident in the models of employee retention and turnover previously discussed, however, many of the following concepts have not been considered in past empirical or theoretical work on turnover and retention.

## Motivational theories

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Early psychological theories understood that striving for need fulfillment (cf. Murray, 1938; Maslow, 1970) is a fundamental human motivation. One such motivation is the need to be consistent (Pittman, 1998). This may explain why commitment is the key antecedent to stay/leave behavior. Once an attachment is formed to an individual, group, or set of values, one may feel pressure to act consistently with that commitment (as illustrated by dissonance theory; Festinger, 1957).

In addition, the need for affiliation (Boyatzis, 1973), or a motivation to form and maintain interpersonal relation-

ships, may act as a strong determinant in organizational retention. Individuals desire social bonds and want to be accepted as part of a social group, and an affiliation with an organization may help fulfill this need. This may be true especially when the group is successful at a task (Cialdini et al., 1976). Individuals may attempt to build or maintain an attachment to a group as a means of boosting self-esteem via the group's success.

Finally, individuals may have a need for achievement (Atkinson & Raynor, 1974). This may drive one to strive for mastery and success, including persevering and overcoming difficult tasks. Achievement motivation is related to task performance and persistence (Atkinson & Birch, 1978). Organizations or work environments may provide a context in which this need can be satisfied. Need for achievement has been found to have associations both to effort and leadership in the organizational research (George, 1992).

## Theories of the self

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Given that individuals' self-concepts are complex and often are said to be composed of "multiple-selves" (e.g., self as a employee, self as a spouse, self as an American; Baumeister, 1998), it is not surprising that the organizations to which one belongs are important components of the self. One's identity as a group member may be central to the self, therefore increasing attachment to that group because one would experience a significant loss of the self should he or she leave that organization. In addition, the extent to which one's role within an organization is consistent with one's self-concept, the greater his or her commitment to that organization is likely to be. However, if one's role within the organization shifts and becomes inconsistent with the self-concept, commitment is expected to decrease. Organizations also provide a channel for obtaining information about the self. At a basic level, the group provides a means of self-esteem maintenance. Vocational organizations give individuals the opportunity to fulfill affiliative and achievement needs, which can serve to enhance self-esteem. In addition, the information obtained from the group can provide self-verification (Swann, 1987).

**It is not surprising that the organizations to which one belongs are important components of the self.**

Just as individuals tend to hold attitudes and beliefs that are consistent with their actions, individuals also prefer to

associate with others who provide information consistent with their self-views. Social groups often act to reflect information about the self to individuals, and individuals prefer to associate with groups that provide the information they are anticipating. This idea has interesting implications by suggesting that if one has a positive view of the one's work-related abilities, commitment would be greatest when that person's co-workers support this view; likewise, if one has a negative view of one's work-related abilities, commitment should be high if that person's co-workers confirm these negative self-views (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989). The former prediction is similar to Lee and Mitchell's (1994) Unfolding Model, whereby if individuals' roles in organizations are consistent with their self-concepts, they are likely to remain in their respective organizations. However, an inconsistency in

**Self-expansion theory posits that individuals are motivated to "expand" themselves and gain the knowledge held by others.**

their roles and self-concepts would be predictive of turnover. The additional hypothesis, based on Swann's research, provides an interesting caveat to the Unfolding Model.

A final concept related to the importance of organizations to the self is self-expansion (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). Self-expansion theory posits that individuals are motivated to "expand" themselves and gain the knowledge held by others. Within the organization, one can expand the self

by encompassing the information, skills, and attitudes that others have by interacting with them. Maintaining group membership provides individuals with opportunities to expand the self by gaining new knowledge. From this perspective, it could be expected that individuals would initially be very satisfied and committed to the organizations to which they have joined (as hypothesized in the Cusp Catastrophe Model). However, unless the group is continually infused with novel information, commitment and satisfaction may decline over time as opportunities to expand the self are depleted.

## Theories of attitudes

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The extant research in the field of attitudes may have utility in investigating job retention because of its link to job satisfaction – defined as an attitude towards one's job – and stay/leave behaviors. From an expectancy-value perspective (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), an attitude toward an object is the function of an individual's desire for an attribute weighted by the individual's perception that the

object has that attribute. This is similar to the met expectations approach (Porter & Steers, 1973) utilized in the job turnover literature. For example, an individual who values high pay in a job will have a positive attitude towards the job if the job is perceived as paying well. In addition, although the job may hold other positive attributes (e.g., high social status), if the individual does not value these attributes, they may not impact the attitude towards the job. Furthermore, a negative attitude may occur if the job is not characterized by the attributes the individual desires (e.g., flexible hours). Another perspective involving attitudes and retention acknowledges that commitment to a group may follow from behaviors that have been previously performed.

Researchers in the area of attitude change and influence (e.g., Cialdini, 1993) have noted that there are several conditions that promote positive attitudes toward groups and increase commitment to those groups based on the motivation to be consistent, including cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). For example, making public displays of group affiliation tends to contribute to positive attitudes and commitment toward that group (Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). From this perspective it would be expected that behaviors such as wearing one's uniform in public would positively affect military commitment. Likewise, it has been demonstrated that exerting effort to join a group increases satisfaction and commitment toward that group (Aronson & Mills, 1959). Although these particular studies have focused on short-term effects, similar dissonance-based commitment has been robust over extended periods of time (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956). Organizations such as the armed forces that require individuals to complete a difficult training program (e.g., boot camp) before joining the group capitalize on this phenomenon as a means of building organizational loyalty and commitment.

**An attitude toward an object is the function of an individual's desire for an attribute weighted by the individual's perception that the object has that attribute.**

In a similar vein, several studies on "sunk costs" and behavioral commitment indicate that commitment increases as a function of past investments in a course of action (Garland, 1990). It is possible that these effects are being driven by the perceptions of project completion that accompany sunk costs (Garland & Conlon, 1998). However, there are discrepant findings with regard to sunk costs and subsequent behaviors. For example,

individuals may become adverse to risk as a means of protecting invested resources (Zeelenberg & van Dijk, 1997), but it also is possible that sunk costs can also promote a risk mindset (i.e., "I have nothing to lose"; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Applied to turnover, the predictions stemming from the application of a sunk costs perspective depends on perceptions of completion and risk. Individuals who perceive that their employment projects are near completion may be likely to remain in their jobs to work toward their goals. However, the perception of risk leads to less clear predictions – one may be influenced by the risks perceived to be associated with remaining in a particular job (e.g., because of impending changes in the organization), or leaving the organization to seek an alternative job. For example, one employee may perceive that he has devoted many years to an organization and will maintain commitment so as not to lose that investment whereas another employee might perceive that she has lost many years to the organization and may be willing to risk seeking other jobs. Thus, the sunk costs perspective is not clear in regard to the behavioral implications stemming from the perceptions of risk.

The assumption of most psychological theories of organizational retention is that attitudes toward, and commitment to, a group will predict the behavioral outcome of retention. However, much early social psychological research has demonstrated that there is not always a correspondence between attitudes and behavioral outcomes (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1998, for review). How can this lack of predictive power be accounted for? The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) proposes that it is not simply an attitude toward an object (e.g., job

**In a similar vein, several studies on "sunk costs" and behavioral commitment indicate that commitment increases as a function of past investments in a course of action.**

satisfaction) that is the proximal predictor of behavior toward that object (e.g., quitting one's job). Instead, the behavioral intention, or one's decision to engage in the behavior, is the best predictor of the behavior. This approach to the attitude-behavior relationship is similar to the rational approaches to job turnover previously discussed whereby the intention to quit is often construed as the proximal determinant of turnover behaviors (Mobley et al., 1979). The behavioral intention is influenced by

several factors, including attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. For example, one employee may plan on leaving an organization if she has a positive attitude toward the action of

leaving. In addition, if those around her, such as family and friends, think that she should perform the behavior (subjective norms), the intention may be strengthened.

Finally, for an individual to intend to behave in a given way, she must perceive she has control over that behavior (i.e., that she can perform the behavior). The Theory of Planned Behavior provides a framework for understanding the conditions in which behavior can be predicted. For example, an individual may have a positive attitude toward quitting his job, but he may intend to stay at the job because his family desires the stability and security associated with the job.

**Much early social psychological research has demonstrated that there is not always a correspondence between attitudes and behavioral outcomes.**

The subjective norm component of the model is paralleled in the job retention literature as a non-work factor (such as in the Expanded Model proposed by Mobley et al., 1979). Subjective norms have been found to be strong predictors of turnover intentions; in some cases, subjective norms predict turnover intentions even better than the attitude toward the job (Abrams, Ando, & Hinkle, 1998). In addition, Abrams et al. report that subjective norms have a stronger impact on turnover intentions for individuals in collectivist versus individualist societies.

## Theories of interpersonal relationships

The study of interpersonal relationships may substantially contribute to the conceptualization of organizational commitment. Much work in the field of relationships has attempted to identify the conditions that promote commitment within romantic partnerships, and the general forms of these models are equally applicable to organizational commitment. Although the object or target of the commitment may differ, the processes of the commitment may be quite similar. For example, interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959; see Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996, for review) may provide insights into the conditions that promote commitment to any object (e.g., relationship partner, organization, job, or activity), with commitment being an important antecedent of retention.

The Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980), as discussed earlier, stems from interdependence theory and was developed as a framework to understand commitment processes (Le & Agnew, 2001). Based on this model, commitment to an object is the proximal determinant of

behaviors related to that object and is a function of satisfaction with, alternatives to, and investments in that object. For example, being satisfied with one's job, having few potential alternative jobs, and being invested in the job would promote commitment to that job. Conversely, an individual who is not satisfied, has alternatives, and is not invested would be less committed. Although the Investment Model was initially developed to describe the conditions influencing commitment to a romantic relationship partner (cf. Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998), it has successfully been applied to other types of commitment such as friendships (cf. Lin & Rusbult, 1995), client-patient relationships (cf. Winstead, Derlega, Lewis, & Margulis, 1988), jobs (cf. Van Yperen, 1998), colleges (cf. Hatcher, Kryter, Prus, & Fitzgerald, 1992), and activities (cf. Koslowsky & Kluger, 1986).

An investment model view of commitment has many commonalities with the rational approach to job commitment whereby both have similar construals of commitment and emphasize the importance of alternatives. From both perspectives, satisfaction is thought to be determined by the benefits or rewards achieved, and the costs incurred, from the job. In addition, both hold that expectancies serve as a comparison for the outcomes received. Furthermore, both perspectives include alternatives as an important determinant of commitment or intention to quit, either as a generalized perception of the economic climate, or as specific to other job opportunities.

In a similar vein to the Investment Model, Johnson's Commitment Model (Johnson, 1973; 1991) outlines several different types of commitment that are related to relationship maintenance. First, personal commitment is similar to satisfaction in that it includes the degree to which one wants to continue the association with the group or partner. Second, structural commitment is similar to alternatives and investments from the investment model as it encompasses the degree to which one has to maintain the relationship because of investments in the partnership or a lack of alternatives. Third, moral commitment, or the feeling of obligation to stay in a relationship because of a sense of duty (e.g., "I ought to stay because of my values"), may provide insight into the sense of duty and loyalty (e.g., to "serve one's country") expressed by military personnel. This last moral component is unique to Johnson's commitment model.

Finally, the understanding of organizational retention and commitment might be enhanced from the growing body of literature that examines adult attachment styles (see Morgan & Shaver, 1999, for review). Adult attachment

theory posits that individuals develop distinctive ways of relating to others, characterized by affective patterns (e.g., trust, security, anxiety, indifference) and cognitive models of the self and other (i.e., degree of positivity of self-model and other-model; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). While the majority of the attachment research has investigated the bonds between individuals and their romantic partners (cf. Shaver, Belsky, & Brennan, 2000), friendships (cf. Florian, Mikulincer, & Bucholtz, 1995), or parent-child interactions (cf. Rholes, Simpson, Blakely, Lanigan, & Allen, 1997), some work has investigated attachment between individuals and other targets (e.g., God; Kirkpatrick, 1998).

Recent research has expanded this line of thought to attachment bonds between individuals and the groups to which they belong (cf. Smith, Murphy, & Coats, 1999).

Particularly, individuals' mental models of the self as a group member and of groups as sources of identity and esteem are associated with willingness to work with group members to solve problems, use of conflict avoidance strategies, and time spent with the group.

Furthermore, attachment style is related to intention to remain in a group. In sum, attachment patterns manifested in anxiety toward the group, or avoidance of the group, may be stable predictors of affective, cognitive, and behavioral consequences related to group membership (Smith et al., 1999). From this perspective, individuals' memberships in and commitments to organizations may be influenced by their unique attachment styles.

**These groups may serve as a means to achieve outcomes that are unobtainable by individuals, as well as promote a sense of security and social support for those individuals.**

## Evolutionary theory

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Although most applications of evolutionary theory in social psychology revolve around interpersonal relationships (e.g., attractiveness, attitudes toward sex, antecedents of jealousy), the evolutionary framework can be used to examine group behavior. For example, Caporael and Baron (1997) suggest that group contexts are a fundamental part of individuals' natural environment, and that many adaptations function to better serve social interaction. These theorists identify three "core configurations" of groups that humans behave within, including: the dyad, the family group or work team which functions to distribute cognition and share effort on group

tasks; the deme, or band of approximately 30 member that are a part of an individual's social identity; and, the larger macrodeme, or the social group with common language and cultural symbols. These groups may serve as a means to achieve outcomes that are unobtainable by individuals, as well as promote a sense of security and social support for those individuals. If membership in these groups serves an evolutionary function, it might be expected that humans have a preference to join or remain in organizations that are characterized by the features of one or more of these core configurations.

### **Implications of social psychological theories for examining military retention**

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Social psychological theories have much to offer the study of military retention. At the broadest level, the field of social psychology is concerned with behaviors that occur within social environments and the social influences on those behaviors. Therefore, because of the social nature of military duty (e.g., teamwork, leadership, attitudes toward

others), it is not surprising that the general theories proposed by social psychology would apply to military behaviors as a sub-class of social behaviors. The influence of military employment on individuals may be extreme because military service often extends beyond the job. Compared to the civilian world, military service is a lifestyle choice, with the military offering friendships, social support, recreational activities, places of worship, and health services in addition to the job itself.

Given that military employment is a strong force in individuals' lives, it is proposed that the military serves as an important source of need fulfillment for those immersed in the military culture. The military promotes achievement and affiliative needs, and is a source of information in the development of individuals' self-concepts. Because of the importance the military establishment has in these individuals' lives, they may feel a sense of attachment, loyalty, and commitment to the military. In turn, commitment is a strong predictor of retention.

# **S E C T I O N 4**

**A NEW FRAMEWORK  
FOR STUDYING  
MILITARY RETENTION**

# A New Framework For Studying Military Retention

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The military's retention research, including theories of job turnover and social psychological theories of commitment and attachment have outlined a preliminary framework for studying military retention. This framework will guide future research in both civilian and military retention.

**Consistent with the theoretical approaches outlined throughout this paper, the construct of commitment is a focal point in the proposed framework.**

Consistent with the theoretical approaches outlined throughout this paper, the construct of commitment is a focal point in the proposed framework. We believe that the organizational research on turnover, and the social psychological literature on attachment and relationships, both point to commitment as being a critical influence on decisions to maintain or dissolve existing relationships. However, most theoretical

approaches to commitment, particularly organizational commitment, are static, taking a "snapshot" of commitment and its antecedents without acknowledging the processes by which commitment levels develop over time. Thus, for both military and civilian populations, our framework depicts commitment as a developing process that influences stay/leave decisions.

However, in addition to commitment, recent turnover literature points to the importance of random environmental shocks that can influence turnover. These shocks are major and minor events, usually unpredicted, that can cause people to think about changing jobs. Events such as the enlisted person becoming pregnant or a spouse becoming pregnant, being passed over for promotion, or an unexpected change in assignment, are examples of shocks. These unexpected events are believed to ignite thought processes as to the pros and cons of staying with an organization. In civilian and military populations, whether these shocks eventually lead to turnover is a function of the implications of the shocks themselves and the existing level of commitment to the organization.

Finally, in military populations, another important factor must be considered in the development of any framework and that is the normal time structure of military turnover. A military member's contract for a term of service is an added variable that filters the effect of both

shocks and commitment. It constrains the possibility of withdrawal and may lead to manifesting dissatisfaction in other dysfunctional ways. It also may influence the extent to which various work and non-work events are interpreted. Shocks are proposed to have a stronger impact on commitment as military members approach the end of their term of service. We depict our preliminary framework visually in Figure 1 and discuss the rationale behind the variables that comprise it below.

## Commitment

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An important psychological concept for understanding organizational retention is commitment. At the broadest level, commitment is "an agreement or pledge to do something in the future; the state of being obligated or emotionally impelled" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2001). Even from this simple dictionary definition, several important features of commitment emerge. First, a commitment involves an obligation or promise, whether implicit or explicit. This obligation may be related to an object, behavior, decision, or attitude. Furthermore, a commitment implies a temporal context in that the obligation is not passing but will persist into the future. Early social psychological research on commitment proposed a similar understanding of commitment. For example, Kiesler and Sakumura viewed commitment as "a pledging or binding of the individual to behavioral acts..." (1966, p. 349). Once a commitment is made, behaviors and attitudes consistent with that commitment follow.

Commitment also can be considered as an individual's attachment to another individual, organization, or broader social group, and is a key variable relating to decisions to continue or sever a relationship. It includes the cohesive bond that one feels toward an individual or group, the intention to maintain that bond for the foreseeable future, and an obligation to act within the interests of that social bond. In many models of turnover it is proposed that commitment is a proximal determinant of stay/leave decisions in organizations, and the processes influencing individuals' commitment levels are therefore of foremost interest. The current frame-

**The current framework specifically focuses on the developmental process of commitment over time, as a function of an employee's job satisfaction, job alternatives, job investments, and normative commitment behaviors.**

work specifically focuses on the developmental process of commitment over time, as a function of an employee's job satisfaction, job alternatives, job investments, and normative commitment behaviors.

### **Job satisfaction**

When it comes to satisfaction, the degree to which one is satisfied with an individual or a group may be the most salient factor in determining whether or not one maintains the association with that individual or group. However, it should be noted that there are two possible ways in which satisfaction operates to influence stay/leave decisions. Some models (cf. Multi-route Model; Steers & Mowday, 1981) view satisfaction and commitment as independent factors acting upon individuals' decisions to maintain or dissolve interpersonal associations. However, most models (cf. the investment model; Rusbult, 1980) retain a focus on commitment as the most proximal determinant of relationship continuance and view satisfaction as one of several variables that impact commitment level. Our starting assumption is that satisfaction is a cause of commitment and, therefore, studying the development of satisfaction is an important component of studying the development of commitment and turnover. However, satisfaction is not the only factor that influences commitment and turnover, evidenced by the consistent but only modest correlations between individual job satisfaction levels and turnover intentions and behaviors. Other factors influencing commitment are job alternatives, investments, and commitment norms.

### **Job alternatives**

Alternatives include other jobs that individuals could take if they left their current position (e.g., existing offers from other companies), or a generalized perception of the overarching economic health of their environment (i.e., perceptions that opportunities would be plentiful if a job search was conducted). Furthermore, the concept of alternatives includes such constructs as generalized training (i.e., the more general one's training is, the higher the probability that he or she is qualified for alternative positions), as well as prestige and visibility of the current position or organization (i.e., the more prestigious and visible the current job is, the higher the demand for an employee's services from competing organizations). In addition, the alternatives component accounts for the subpopulation of marginal workers who have the realistic alternative of holding no job at all. The perception of alternatives may change abruptly and unpredictably based upon economic conditions or happenstance. However, the perception of the availability of alternatives also may

change gradually as skills develop and a sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy is enhanced. It is ironic that the self-esteem built by the military experience also may contribute to the problem of military turnover.

### **Investments**

A third important component of commitment includes the irretrievable investments that individuals make in their jobs. The investments may be monetary (e.g., a retirement fund), tied to the self-concept (i.e., the job comprises an important component of the self that would be lost upon quitting), or related to the social network that is tied to the job. Time itself is an investment that builds commitment, and there is much psychological literature that suggests effortful experiences (like basic training or combat assignments) serve as investments that build commitment. As such, high commitment organizations often have effortful and sacrificing entry and orientation procedures.

### **Commitment norms**

People often come to organizations with values and beliefs that enhance their level of commitment. Sometimes these values are relevant to any situation (e.g., "I'm not a quitter"), and sometimes they relate to the specific organization (e.g., beliefs about the role of the services in protecting the country). These constitute norms that influence commitment to an organization. For example, individuals might feel it is against convention to break a contract, quit a job that a family depends on for income, or display withdrawal behaviors that are contrary to the values of the organization. Our framework includes these beliefs as an influence on retention through commitment.

### **Environmental shocks**

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As Lee and Mitchell (1994) highlight, many people do not continuously process information regarding staying or leaving an organization; the question of whether one should continue with a job (or alternatively, whether one should quit) is not asked on a day-to-day basis. Instead, particular environmental events occur that shift people into a cognitive state in which they actively think about the pros and cons of staying with an organization. Both the Cusp Catastrophe Model and the Unfolding Model suggest sudden changes in employee behavior at some point in the turnover process; the Unfolding Model suggests that shocks act as catalysts to start a rational thought process, while the Cusp Catastrophe Model posits a sudden change in behavior (i.e., withdrawal behaviors) after the decision to leave an organization is made. Recognizing that particu-

lar shocks or events influence thoughts and behavior is an important part of this integrated framework. The addition of shocks places the focus on individual-level processes that occur in situations where an employee is forced to think about leaving or staying in an organization.

## **Work and non-work factors**

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The concepts of commitment (including satisfaction, investments, alternatives and norms) and shocks provide a ready framework for studying the way both work and non-work factors influence turnover. Work experiences obviously influence all the components discussed, but non-work factors have important influences as well. Social networks, such as families, can influence commitment norms and job alternatives. They either can temper the impact of shocks, or be a source of shocks themselves (e.g., pregnancies, loss of a job by a spouse, etc.). The concepts of commitment and shocks allow for the more immediate processes of retention decisions that mediate the effects of quality of life factors.

## **Natural time structure of military turnover**

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Unlike most civilian careers, the military career is one contingent upon a series of contracts for specified lengths of service. Thus, the natural time structure of military turnover that occurs when a service contract ends is a pivotal feature that must be included in any framework of military retention. Breaching a military contract comes not without serious consequences, and because of this, creates additional factors for military members to consider during the retention process. As described above, being bound to stay with the military for a certain amount of time most likely influences how a soldier perceives a shock. For example, an unexpected event that occurs just prior to the time of re-enlistment may lead a soldier to leave the military, whereas the same event might be perceived as a minor annoyance if it occurs three years prior to the time the soldier can resign easily.

## **An innovative approach to guide future retention research**

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The primary goal of this report was to propose a state-of-the-art framework for studying organizational retention. We believe our preliminary model moves along this path. Its utility will be assessed in terms of its ability to generate interesting and innovative research questions. Here we offer some illustrative examples.

## **Understanding shocks in the military environment**

As we have noted, shocks can elicit the cognitive processes that influence retention. They raise the possibility of leaving and thus produce the "push" that is counterbalanced by the "pull" of commitment. Yet nothing is known about the environmental shocks that military members most likely encounter across the span of their military careers. Consequently, research that descriptively examines the nature of key events experienced by members across their military career, the relative impact of various kinds of shocks generated at work and by the family, the impact of those shocks on commitment, and retention decisions made at various points along a military member's career, etc., will go a long way toward understanding the influences on military retention.

## **Lack of commitment, military time frames, and dysfunctional behavior**

The military time frame constrains the turnover decision. Yet shocks and commitment problems can occur at any point in the military career. If the opportunity to leave one's job is absent, problems of withdrawal will be manifested in other ways, including decreased on-the-job performance and increased interpersonal problems at work and at home. Consequently, research on turnover constraints and dysfunctional behavior is warranted.

## **The development of commitment**

While discerning the factors that influence job satisfaction is important for understanding the development of commitment, so too are understandings of the nature of investments, norms, and alternatives. These additional factors have been understudied in the military, yet have a very strong influence on turnover. How do psychological investments accrue as a function of various military experiences? What is the role of the military community in the development of commitment-related norms? Can the building of self-confidence through the military experience contribute to perceiving job alternatives and therefore contribute to turnover? These kinds of questions regarding commitment flow from the proposed framework.

Taken together, we are not suggesting that these are the only research questions of interest; rather, we offer them as examples of the kinds of interesting questions that are raised by the proposed retention framework.

## Conclusion and future directions

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Constructive research on organizational retention should be guided by a theoretically grounded framework and supported by longitudinal investigations that can inform and verify the important processes involved. The process framework described herein provides a road map by which to integrate past research, as well as guide the development of a research program to investigate the variables of interest. Military research has tended to avoid continuity in the use and revision of theoretical models. However, for optimal understanding, a long-term perspective needs to be taken to examine the processes involved with retention as is proposed here. This framework is adaptable and should be revised as new data is collected to support or refute particular processes and relationships. A small number of studies is not sufficient for the explanation of the retention/turnover process in the military; a research program is needed.

Both military and civilian research are limited by their use of cross-sectional survey designs that take mere snapshots of behavior at one point in time, rather than over time. Although these designs require fewer resources and are less time consuming than more in-depth, longitudinal studies, they result in the loss of important process information. In contrast to cross-sectional designs, panel

designs (i.e., continuous measurements of the same group of individuals over time, also known as cross-sequential cohort designs) enable researchers to look at the psychological mechanisms operating within individuals. Longitudinal investigations allow for examination of the timeframe in which predictor variables influence outcomes. This may be particularly relevant because military service is often constrained to a contracted enlistment period.

The proposed framework both simplifies past models and incorporates important factors that weren't previously included. A strength of this framework is the recognition that commitment develops over time, for the retention process is not one characterized by stasis. In addition, this framework recognizes both the similarities and the differences between retention processes in civilian versus military populations, and these traits are incorporated into two separate retention road maps. The role of environmental shocks and their influences on commitment, as well as work and family factors as agents of influence, emphasize individual processing differences in employees' decisions to leave or stay in their affiliated organizations. It is at this individual process level where the crux of policy issues can be found; where the Quality of Life programs can be informed; and where the ensuing interventions can be targeted.

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Figure 1. A framework to study organizational retention.



