

EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEE-SUPERIOR CONFLICT
AND VOLUNTARY TURNOVER IN THE WORKPLACE: A COMPARISON
OF COMPANIES ACROSS INDUSTRIES

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Employee turnover is a topic of concern for a multitude of organizations. A variety of work-related factors play into why an individual chooses to change jobs, but these are often symptoms of underlying issues, such as conflict. This study set out to determine if conflict between employees and their superiors has an impact on the level of turnover in an organization, and if manufacturing versus non-manufacturing industry type makes a difference. The generated data were based on 141 selected cases from the ethnographic cases in the Workplace Ethnography Project. Linear and logistic regressions were performed, finding that there is a significant relationship between conflict with superiors and the level of turnover.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, individuals going into the workforce will most likely expect to change jobs a few times during the life of their career. Even though seven out of ten young adults, ages 15 to 31, consider it better to stay with one organization over their career, approximately one-third believe they will not remain at their current job for more than one year, and half expect to leave within two years (Miller, 1997). Individuals born late in the baby boom were found to have held almost 10 jobs from the ages of 18-36 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002). This type of career path impacts organizations as they will have to work harder to retain their employees as it impacts them in several ways. Losing employees reduces effectiveness and increases expenses as intellectual capital is lost and new individuals have to be trained to take over the positions (Hillmer, 2004). It is just as important to factor in the real costs related to time and productivity loss. These costs include: costs due to the employee leaving, recruitment costs, training costs, lost productivity costs, lost sales costs, and new hire costs. Calculations of such numbers can easily reach 150 percent of the person's salary. If the calculations are for a managerial or sales position then the percentage can reach to 200-250 percent (Bliss, 2001). An in-depth mathematical model used to determine the costs of turnover took an employee who makes about \$60,000 annually and figured that the costs would exceed \$100,000 (Tziner & Birati, 1996).

So the question at the top of the list is, what drives employees to leave. A variety of factors play into why an individual chooses to change jobs. Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, availability of other options, emotional stress, and many more are viable reasons affecting an employee's decision to move on. But each of these factors is a symptom and not a cause, and it is discovering the cause that will allow organizations to act in solving the problem.

After pouring through a multitude of articles on these two major themes in the industrial/organizational literature, a common thread appeared. A potential root cause was identified. It was something that each and every employee has experienced at some point or another, and that is conflict. Conflict is an infectious phenomenon that gets under the skin of those involved, with known effects such as feelings of hostility, anxiety, and stress. Conflict between coworkers can of course result in such issues, but more importantly conflict between employees and their supervisors may result in employees looking elsewhere for employment. Researchers have been studying and writing about turnover and conflict for quite a long time. Though the research is extensive, the current study turns focus to this specific area that has been neglected. The purpose of this study is to determine if conflict between employees and their supervisors has a positive impact on the level of turnover in an organization?

Turnover

What is turnover? Research has a long road before the phenomenon is completely understood since there are methodological issues and the psychological processes involved in an individual's departure from the organization that remain

uncertain (Van Dick, et al., 2004). Tett and Meyer (1993) used a definition surmised from a collection of studies reviewed for their path analyses based on meta-analytic findings. They defined turnover as the termination of an individual's employment with a given company. This definition doesn't distinguish between voluntary and involuntary leaves, but for the purposes of most studies, researchers include only voluntary leaves when they can exclude the rest (Price, 2001). This allows researchers to determine what possible causes prompt an employee to leave the organization of their own volition.

The impact of turnover on a business can be quite costly in a number of different ways. Loss of efficiency is a concern because as employees are preparing to leave the organization they stop working as hard or caring about the business. This can even affect coworkers as they have to increase their workload to compensate for the individual that is leaving. After the employee leaves the issues multiply.

Productivity likely decreases even more as a new employee is brought up to speed and trained. When the organization's productive capacity is held in human capital the problems associated with turnover can be extremely difficult. Industries that are service oriented may even experience client dissatisfaction due to loss of trust and deterioration of rapport (Mor Barak, Nissly, and Levin, 2001). One study discovered that as voluntary turnover increased, workforce performance decreased, although they did find that the relationship was actually curvilinear (Shaw, Gupta, and Delery, 2005). One can interpret this information to mean that after a certain point where turnover is high

and the organization has lost a large amount of its human capital that continued loss will not have much more of an impact. All of these factors related to turnover can affect the success of the organization, making it a major concern.

To avoid the negative effects of turnover we must first have a good understanding of its antecedents. Over the years study after study has identified multiple variables that correlate with turnover. Mor Barak, et al. (2001) divided the related factors into demographic factors, professional perceptions, and organizational conditions, but this study focuses on a few categories identified: personal characteristics, external factors, and work-related factors (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986, Pettman, 1973).

Personal Characteristics. Personal characteristics of employees are common and conclusive predictors according to the turnover literature (Mor Barak et al., 2001). The factors that have shown a strong relationship with turnover through several studies include age, tenure, and education (Blankertz and Robinson, 1997, Jinnett and Alexander, 1999). Both the younger age groups and better educated employees are more likely to leave an organization (Kiyak et al., 1997, Manlove & Guzell, 1997, Mor Barak et al., 2001). Other researchers agree that employees with higher education levels are the most likely to leave (Huselid & Day, 1991, Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). This may be due to the fact that these more educated employees have job options and alternatives that the lesser-educated individuals do not. Another study, on the other hand, found the significance of age to be weak at $p < .1$ (Mossholder, Settoon & Henagan, 2005). Strong confidence for gender has been found ($p < .005$) indicating that

women are the ones more likely to leave their organization (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986), although the majority of the studies found that there were no differences at all between the genders (Ben-Dror 1994, Jinnett & Alexander, 1999, Koeske & Kirk, 1995, Mor Barak et al., 2001).

In addition, more and more support has been found for the links between physical and emotional factors to level of turnover as well, although in this review several articles had contradicting results. Stress has developed as one of the newest concerns for organizations as multiple studies have discovered that employees who have high levels of stress have a higher likelihood of leaving the organization (Chiu et al., 2005, Mor Barak, et al., 2001) When an employee feels that they are being handed more work than they can handle, known as role overload, or if they are not sure what their responsibilities are for the position, referred to as role ambiguity, they are more likely to leave than stay under that stress (Blankertz & Robinson, 1997, Mor Barak et al., 2001, Schaefer & Moos, 1996). Griffeth et al.'s (2000) meta-analysis, one of the most thorough in the turnover literature, studied these and other stress related factors but did not find any of them had a significant correlation with turnover. Increased emotional exhaustion and burnout in individuals also led to higher turnover rates, but there is additional evidence that social support from family and coworkers can help negate their effects (Lee & Ashforth, 1993, Mor Barak et.al., 2001).

External Factors. A meta-analysis conducted demonstrated that there are two factors that are very significantly related to turnover, employee perceptions and union presence (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). An employee's perception of their job alternatives is

positively related to turnover. It shows that if an employee has other job alternatives they are more likely to explore those options than to stay at a company they are not happy with (Griffeth et al., 2000, Mor Barak et al., 2001). Even just a lack of perceived opportunity for advancement can be enough to increase turnover (Huselid & Day, 1991). The presence and attitudes toward unionization are negatively related to turnover (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986, Mor Barak et al., 2001), though some say loyalty to a union can actually lower turnover rates (Iverson & Deery, 1997). A third external factor, unemployment rate, is related to turnover, but at a less significant level than the others ($p < .01$). It has been seen that unemployment seems to be a better predictor of aggregate turnover than of individual turnover (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986).

Work-Related Factors. For the purposes of this study the final category of work-related factors will be the most important as the focus will be on turnover at the organizational level, as opposed to analyzing the individual. Several work-related factors have been discovered to reliably correlate with turnover. Some of these factors include income, job satisfaction, employee satisfaction with supervision, organizational commitment and, of course, intentions to leave the job.

Income has been consistently studied over the years in the turnover literature, as one would logically assume the presence of a correlation between these factors. Though time and time again it has produced a negative relationship with turnover, it is not quite as strong as some of the other work-related factors (Mor Barak et al., 2001, Huselid & Day, 1991, Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000).

Job satisfaction is one of the most studied antecedents of turnover. The more satisfied an employee is with his or her job the lower the likelihood that they will quit (Chiu et al., 2005, Griffeth et al., 2000, Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Glomb, & Ahlburg, 2005, Lin & Chen, 2004, Susskind et al., 2000, Van Breukelen et al., 2004). Some research indicates that job satisfaction is one of the most predictive factors (Tett & Meyer, 1993), yet other researchers have come to the conclusion there is only a moderate correlation between job satisfaction and turnover, and even others have found the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover to be weak (Mossholder et al., 2005). "There is considerable variation in correlations across studies but they are usually less than .40, thus leaving the majority of variance associated with turnover unexplained" (Carsten & Spector, 1987, p. 374). The results of Carsten and Spector's (1987) analysis support the Muchinsky and Morrow model predicting that the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover will however be stronger during times of low unemployment rates and weaker when the rate of unemployment is high (Carsten et al., 1987).

The second most predictive factor of turnover, even better than job satisfaction, is organizational commitment (Griffeth et al., 2000, Tett & Meyer, 1993). Employees who have similar values and beliefs held by the organization they work for, tend to be committed to the organization. Such commitment can lead to variety of benefits, including a motivation to put forth extra effort for the organization, as well as a desire to remain with the organization, (Mor Barak et.al, 2001). Many empirical studies confirm

the turnover process is greatly influenced by the role of organizational commitment and they generally indicate that turnover intentions are negatively related to organizational commitment (Lin & Chen 2004, Susskind et al., 2000, Van Breukelen et al., 2004).

The climate of an organization follows the same line of thought. A good person-organization-fit creates a comfortable place for an employee to work, making it an environment of which they like being a part. Person-organization-fit refers to the alignment of the person's values and belief system with that of the organization they are working for (Yaniv & Farkas, 2005). The greater the fit between person and organization the higher the likelihood of increased satisfaction for the employee, and the greater the employee's commitment to the organization (O'Reilly et al., 1991, Silverthorne, 2004, Yaniv & Farkas, 2005).

Though there is some disagreement over the strength of many of the turnover antecedents, the research clearly shows that the single best predictor of whether an employee will leave the organization, better than job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and a multitude of others, is the intent to do so (Carsten, et al., 1987, Griffeth, et al., 2000, Price, 2001, Tett & Meyer, 1993). Once the employee decides that the fit is not right, for any reason, and develops the intention to leave the organization, the intention to leave becomes the single best predictor of turnover, a title thought to have belonged to the income level of an individual. Even though there is agreement on the significance of turnover intentions as a predictor, a united definition of turnover intentions is not so apparent. One definition states that the intention to leave is a conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave the organization (Tett & Meyer, 1993) and

another describes turnover intentions “as a psychological response to specific organizational conditions which fall along a continuum of organizational withdrawal behaviors ranging from day-dreaming to the physical act of turnover” (Chiu et al., 2005, p. 839).

Researchers take this predictor very seriously as those that leave organizations usually reported higher turnover intentions, lower identification, and lower satisfaction in subsequent surveys (Van Dick et al., 2004). Turnover intentions are often used due to such data and the difficulty in obtaining actual turnover data (Byrne, 2005). But it seems that this does not really answer the question of why an employee is leaving the organization. Their intent to leave strongly translates into their leaving.

But what can be learned from this? What can organizations do to with this information? Along the same line of thought is the relationship found between absence and turnover. This is an intuitive correlation that seemingly provides no real information to organizations on how to prevent turnover. The importance of these factors to researchers is in the practicality. The research doesn't speak to ways to prevent turnover, but serves as a means for an organization to identify that problems exist, so paths of reform can be initiated earlier (Griffeth et al., 2000, Mitra, Jenkins, Jr., & Gupta, 1992). Other less studied work-related factors appear in the literature as modest antecedents of turnover, such as job scope, routinization, and job involvement, (Griffeth, et al., 2000) leading the need for more specifics on antecedents so that action can be taken before even these indicators are present.

All of the above factors studied in relation to turnover are very important. The identification of work-related factors such as low job satisfaction, low organizational commitment, and high turnover intentions can all predict increased turnover in an organization. The problem is that these factors are actually symptoms of a deeper issue. Organizations can use the levels of these factors as indicators, and then probe into the underlying causes. One such cause is employee conflict.

Conflict

An organization is made up of individuals who each have their own different thoughts, feelings, and interests. Within the organization, interactions between these individuals are inevitable, and therefore so is conflict. One cannot please everyone all of the time when dealing with resource allocation, competition, and other touchy subjects like budgets, but the problem comes when the differences build up into more perilous levels of conflict (Frost, 2003). According to a review of the literature, conflict is defined as “a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party,” (Wall Jr. & Callister, 1995, p.517). Some even say that conflict is a feature of organizational life that is more pervasive than any other (Johnson, Ford, Kaufman, 2000). The ability to manage this pervasive construct is vital to the well-being of an organization as it leads to a variety of detrimental outcomes. The key to management of conflict comes with the understanding of what causes conflict and how to handle the inevitable effects.

Causes of Conflict. This natural phenomenon can take the form of task conflict or as relationship conflict. For the purposes of this study the focus is on the latter.

Relationship conflict is a perception of disagreement among individuals about the content of their decisions, and involves differences in individual characteristics such as viewpoints, ideas and opinions (Medina, Mundante, & Dorado, 2005).

Personality characteristics play an important role in the development of a conflict situation. Studies have found that individuals with Type-A personality report a higher frequency of conflict with subordinates than do Type-B's (Baron, 1989). Though several other studies reviewed by Wall Jr. and Callister (1995) found that personality and other individual differences, such as attitudes, had a very minor impact on conflict.

Goals and commitment also lead to conflict. If a person's perceived powers, and past accomplishments, accompanied by societal norms, lead to high personal goals and aspirations that they are highly committed to achieving, then that person tends to be more likely to experience conflict with another individual. And if the reverse is true, where the individual's commitment to the goal is low, then the probability of conflict is also low (Wall, Jr. & Callister, 1995).

Other likely sources of conflict, when looking at the emotional aspect, include stress and anger. Most people can relate to the sense of edginess stress and anger produce. This uneasiness can fill and fill a person until they cannot keep it under wraps any longer ending in conflict with another (Wall Jr. & Callister, 1995).

Effects of Conflict. Though in many instances conflict can bring a few positive benefits to an organization, such as group efficiency and productivity, creativity and decision quality, this is only true when the conflict is in moderate levels (Wall, Jr. & Callister, 1995).

“Perhaps the most frequent consequence of conflict is upset parties. This can be manifest in a number of ways such as anger, feelings of hostility, socio-emotional separation, tension, anxiety, and stress. Negative emotions can lead in turn to personal frustrations...reduced motivation and performance” (Wall, Jr. & Callister, 1995, p.523). When these negative emotions translate into interpersonal conflict at work, the levels of conflict are negatively related to job satisfaction, and positively related to turnover intentions (Frone, 2000, Medina et al., 2005, Spector & Jex, 1998). Spector and Jex (1998) also discovered that interpersonal conflict at work was positively related to depression and other somatic symptoms, but unrelated to self-esteem. From these findings it is easy to surmise that interpersonal conflict at work appears to be an important job stressor that is related to several harmful outcomes. Additionally, it has been found that conflict is negatively related to pay satisfaction and supervision satisfaction and strongly negatively related to promotional opportunities satisfaction (Kunaviktikul, Nuntasupawat, Srisuphan, & Booth, 2000).

To take a look from the other side, a study conducted addressed the issue of network centrality. This refers to the direct and indirect links the individual has with others which comprise a social network. Individuals with high centrality are more connected to others in the organization implying greater involvement with coworkers,

and they may also become more valued for these reasons. This basically means that if employees have a group they are close to then they are less likely to leave the organization (Mossholder, et al., 2005).

Conflict with Superiors. It seems that a very small percentage of past research has focused on the distinction between the interpersonal relationships with coworkers and their superiors. This is surprising, as it seems reasonable that an individual would relate differently to these two groups. It has been seen that perceptions of a lack of fairness in management practices and dissatisfaction with supervision lead to higher levels of attrition (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986, Mor Barak et.al, 2001). If the same line of thought is kept, then interpersonal conflict with superiors and coworkers may be dissimilar in their relation to organizational and personal outcomes.

Differentiating between the employee-coworker relationship and the employee-superior relationship, in the context of conflict, is essential. The significance lies in the idea that employees identify those individuals with a higher ranking in the organization's hierarchy as representatives of the organization. Though this kind of supervisor-employee dynamic is essential for the success of both positions, interpersonal conflict that may arise is liable to negatively affect a subordinate's outlook and thoughts regarding their job and, subsequently, their employer, (Frone, 2000). Frone proceeded to test a conceptual model on the basis that conflict with coworkers relates to poor personal psychological outcomes while conflict with a superior relates to poor organizational outcomes. Frone found that the model held true. Results showed that interpersonal conflict specifically with a superior was negatively related to job

satisfaction, negatively related to organizational commitment, and positively related to turnover intentions. The Workplace Employment Relations study (1998) found that ninety percent of managers thought that the relations with their employees were very good or good, compared with only 54 percent of employees, and just 2 percent of managers rated relations very poor, compared with 19 percent of employees. Obviously there is a discrepancy in the views between these two groups of individuals. The current study focuses on the conflict within this dynamic.

Industry

All of the literature leads to the belief that turnover and conflict are indeed major concerns in the business world. But the business world is quite a large, and diverse, world. Search for studies on turnover automatically returns several titles related to the nursing, hotel, or other hospitality industries. It is reasonable to believe that the employees in a purely manufacturing setting, doing more routine, less-skilled tasks, would have a different work environment and experience than those individuals in a service-oriented industry. Is there a difference?

The current study addresses conflict's relationship with turnover across industries. It focuses on the difference between manufacturing industries and non-manufacturing industries, also referred to as service industries. A variety of previous studies have discovered that the type of industry moderates the relationship of several correlates with turnover.

A study conducted by Nextera Enterprises discovers that “employee turnover replacement costs have reduced earnings and stock prices by an average of 38 percent in four high turnover industries—specialty retail, call center services, high tech and fast food,” (Nextera Enterprises, 2000, p. 1). Mitra, Jenkins, Jr., and Gupta, (1992) compared manufacturing versus non-manufacturing as a moderator of the absence/turnover relationship and found it was more likely to be significant in manufacturing organizations. In manufacturing organizations, studies find a stronger effect for the presence of a union on turnover. This may be due to the fact that unions are concentrated in manufacturing industries, and they tend to possess greater power and greater overall importance in this type of industry, (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). Manufacturing organizations also have an increased influence of pay, employment perceptions, and economic fluctuations on the level of turnover. On the other hand, the relationship between turnover and job satisfaction is more consistent in service organizations (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986, Nasurdin, Ramayah, & Hemdi, April 11, 2007). And problems related to turnover are often especially difficult in service organizations as the intellectual capital, in the form of knowledge, skills and abilities, are what drive the success of the organization (Mor Barak et al., 2001, Nasurdin et al., April 11, 2007). This type of setup may also lend itself to a stronger reaction from employees to conflict situations. A study on city managers found that 30 out of 33 managers who left office had experienced considerable conflict (Whitaker & DeHoog, 1991). Service organizations such as banks, call-centers, and hospitals all had significantly high levels of turnover intentions, and these intentions related negatively to job satisfaction and

organizational commitment (Van Dick et al., 2004). A study by Iverson and Deery (1997) discovered that the hospitality industry has developed a turnover culture, where the employees enter this industry knowing they will not remain at the organization permanently and that there is little chance of promotion. Hotels have very high turnover rate, with some studies claiming that the global turnover rate varies from 60 percent to 300 percent (Woods, 1997). This industry needs to diligently consider how to retain these employees (Simon & Enzs, 1995).

It was discovered that within the clothing manufacturing industry, the turnover rates varied among employees. Those in more typical manufacturing positions had a turnover rate of 26.5 percent and the turnover rate for higher-skilled positions such as men's and women's tailoring was much lower at 13% and 14% respectively (Taplin, Winterton & Winterton, 2003). This information led to the belief that although manufacturing industries do have turnover difficulties, non-manufacturing industries and their environments will reasonably have more issue with the relationship of conflict to their turnover rates.

Research Questions

For organizations to take action against high turnover costs, the underlying variables that contribute to the issue need to be identified. The aim of this study is to first determine the relationship between organization turnover levels and employee-superior conflict in organizations, which is addressed in the first research question:

Hypothesis 1. The level of turnover in an organization will be higher as the level of employee-superior conflict increases.

As conflict and turnover are people issues, differences in labor force characteristics between manufacturing and non-manufacturing companies may result in a different relationship for these variables. If this is true then the different industries will need to address turnover and conflict in a different manner. This led to the second research question:

Hypothesis 2. The relationship between employee-superior conflict and turnover will be greater in non-manufacturing industries.

Given that the ethnographic data spans several years, and was collected at two different points in time, this study explored time as a variable to confirm the findings of the data. Data from different organizations were collected once in the early 1990s and again in the early 2000s, which allowed a replication of the data analyses. If the relationship between organization turnover levels and conflict with superiors is robust, then there should not be a difference between the two time periods, leading to the last research question:

Hypothesis 3. The relationship between employee-superior conflict and turnover will remain consistent over time.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

Data

The following are the details of the methods used to collect the data for the Workplace Ethnography Project (Hodson, 2002) analyzed in this study.

Sample. The study to be conducted used archival data from the, 1944-2002, database to analyze turnover and conflict data at the organization level. Ethnographies are book-length observations, made over about one year's time, that provide in-depth descriptions on organization characteristics and topics related to the workplace, by PhD level observers. The project generated content-coded data from organizational ethnographies (Hodson, 1998).

The Workplace Ethnography Project (Hodson, 2002) conducted a comprehensive search and review, identified the most appropriate ethnographies to include in the study, and a conducted a thorough examination of each book. Three elements were used to identify the target observations. The first element was that the observation period had to be a minimum of six months. Second, a single organization or a small set of organizations had to be the focal point. Lastly, the ethnography had to focus on a minimum of one group of workers, such as an assembly line, a task force, or department team (Hodson, 2005).

The data were based on 141 selected ethnographic cases taken from the 156 separate workplace ethnographies examining organizations. Some of the observations

reported allowed for more than one case to be coded. The instrument used to code the ethnographies was developed by Randy Hodson and his team. Starting with a list of associated concepts and preliminary categories, the team thoroughly read a sample of eight ethnographies and then coded and discussed their findings with the other members of the team. This process was performed to improve the reliability of the instrument by keeping, removing, or developing new items that allowed coding concepts from specific behaviors as opposed to items needing more coder inference. Additional coders were trained on a common ethnography to elicit similar techniques. Once instrument improvements and training on a common ethnography were complete the ethnographies were coded.

Accuracy was extremely important as these are observations, and therefore it was checked through a debriefing of the primary coder by a member of the research staff. As another check for reliability, 10 percent of the cases were recoded.

The overall reliability for the percent agreement among coders for the Workplace Ethnography data is .79. This number represents the average correlation between codings of a given book by independent coders. In addition, twenty-seven different books (cases) were coded by multiple coders from a sample size of 204 (13%). All 27 were coded at least twice and five were coded by a third independent reviewer, (Hodson 2004, p 1). Item by item reliability analysis was also performed representing the agreement on a common answer between codings for the specific ethnography, and then averaged across all cases with multiple codings. Other checks on validity show no evidence that

theoretical orientation, ethnographer characteristics, or coder effects influenced the findings (Hodson, 1998).

The code sheet contained 117 questions including demographic information. The content questions were set up as dichotomous or single Likert-type scales ranging from four to six options, and included an option for no information available. There was a wide range of questions regarding organizational factors on topics such as labor force composition, nature of company ownership, the situation of the company, employment size, occupation, pay scheme, staff turnover, layoff frequency, organization communications, as well as recruitment and retention of personnel. Another series of questions dealt with job satisfaction, pay, benefit package, job security, effort bargain, conflict with management/supervisors, training, worker strategies, nature of consent/compliance, and conditions of consent/compliance. Further questions focused on management with questions on leadership, organization of production, sexual harassment, and control strategies. Community factors regarding unemployment and if the area was rural or urban, and the nature of work, such as autonomy, creativity, meaningful work, freedom of movement, comfort of work, injuries, employment status, and frequency of conflict with customers were gathered. The particular focal group was also detailed.

Variables

The variables chosen for this study were turnover, conflict with superiors, industry type, and time-frame.

Turnover. Turnover was assessed through the descriptions of the company. It may have been discussed in a straightforward manner in the early description of the company or it may have been revealed later in the discussion of the work and the workers. The Perry, 1978 ethnography on a garbage collection cooperative, was coded as having a low level of turnover had the following quote to draw from, (as cited in Hodson, 2001, p.220) “I’ve been raised in this company...I loved it from—when I was old enough to count money, I collected garbage bills” An example quote from the Palm (1922, p.22) ethnography (as cited in Hodson, 1997, p. 1202) stated “ What does the expression ‘well-run’ mean when applied to a firm where employees come and go as though visiting a department store.” After reviewing the entire case, using the training provided, the ethnography coder chose the most appropriate option from the scale which included low, medium, high, and no information options. The intercoder reliability, percentage agreement, for this variable was .73.

Conflict. The ethnography data split conflict into two variables: conflict with supervisors, and conflict with management. Conflict with supervisors was assessed by defining supervisors as those individuals that were involved in supervising the day-to-day activities in the work environment. The conflict with management variable was assessed by defining management as higher-level managers who are usually removed from the front-line. It could also refer to the organization management structure as a whole. In this study, the important factor was to measure any conflict with a superior. After reviewing the means, standard deviations, and correlations with turnover for the variables separately it justified the combination of the two. Therefore, to assess conflict

with superiors in this study, the two variables were combined to include any conflict with either of these groups. Conflict included various forms of complaining as well as latent conflict as long as there was a statement about it made in the observation. Using the training provided, the ethnography coder chose the most appropriate option for the question on conflict with supervisors from the six Likert-type options: never, infrequent, average, frequent, constant and no information.

The following is a quote from the Savage and Lombard, 1978 case, (as cited in Hodson, 1997, p. 447) where conflict with superiors was coded as “infrequent”, ‘In the plant, the manager discussed production problems and passed the time of day with groups of workers. He appeared alert and attentive and obviously enjoyed conversation with everyone....Talking with people and listening to them was what he did best.’ The next example is a passage from the Westwood (1982, p. 25-26) ethnography (as cited in Hodson, 1998, p. 1194) where a coder indicated that conflict was frequent:

There was no suggestion from the women in John’s department that management had either the right or the ability to manage. Instead, the women were constantly critical of management. They asked, ‘When are they going to manage? After all it’s what they get paid for and it’s a darn sight more than we get.’ [Lead workers], especially were very critical of management:

Jessie: Either we’ve got no work or there’s a bloody panic on here. I ask you, what do management do with their time? I reckon I could do better myself than this lot. This place never runs smoothly.

Vi: Management don't know what they're doing.

Edna: I agree, they tell you one thing, you get ready to do it and then it doesn't arrive.

The test for intercoder reliability for the conflict variable revealed a congruence of .90.

Industry. The industry variable was separated into manufacturing and non-manufacturing types using the occupation information collected. Occupation was determined by identifying the activities that the workers spent the most of their time performing. Manufacturing was defined as an industry group that "includes (1) durable goods such as lumber and wood, furniture and fixtures, primary metal, fabricated metal, machinery, electric and electronic equipment, transportation equipment, motor vehicles and equipment, stone, clay, and glass, and instruments and (2) non durable goods such as food, textile mills, apparel, paper, chemicals, petroleum, rubber and plastics," and non-manufacturing or service industry was defined as an industry that provides services rather than tangible objects (Indiana Factbook, April 23, 2007, p. 1). Using these definitions the occupation categories of Assembly, Farm, and Unskilled labor were combined into the manufacturing category and coded as 1, and Professional, Management, Clerical, Sales, Skilled trade, and Service, were combined for the non-manufacturing category and coded as 0.

Time. The data were collected in two parts. Since two collection periods were available it permitted the opportunity to confirm the relationship between conflict with superiors and turnover level through two samples. This removes concerns that may be related to methodological issues. The first round of collections took place in the early

1990s and then the second in the early 2000s. This allowed the variable to be easily divided into two categories, Time 1, binary coded as 0, consisted of data collected from 1991-1992, and Time 2, coded as 1, consisted of data collected from 1999-2003.

Analyses

To describe the sample, descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, for demographic data and variables used in this study, were calculated. These data are presented in Table 1. Frequencies were calculated for responses to the conflict and turnover items. Each variable had missing data. For the turnover variable, there were 28 missing cases, and for conflict, 7 cases were missing data. Also, the data was collected from several different countries: Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, France, Great Britain, Hungary, India, Israel, Japan, Norway, the Philippines, Scotland, South Africa, Sweden, Taiwan, the United States, and Zambia. To avoid any cultural differences, only the cases from the English speaking countries, Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States, were kept. After deletion of the 63 cases with, data on the remaining 141 organizations were available for analysis. Correlations were conducted for all of the predictors to test for multicollinearity, Table 2, and it was determined not to be an issue. In the analysis, the five conflict values and two industry values were entered as the independent variables, and the three levels of turnover were the dependent variable.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) for Variables and Demographic Data.

Variable	Mean	SD
Turnover	2.04	.88
Conflict	3.14	1.03
Industry*	.41	.49
Time*	.48	.50
Employment Size	2183.84	4927.03
Percent Female **	31.25	30.18
Percent Minority **	28.99	29.16

* These variables were binary coded. Refer to Methods for coding details.

**These data were collected at Time 2 only

Table 2. Correlations of the Independent and Dependent Variables.

	Turnover	Conflict	Industry	Collection Time
Turnover	1			
Conflict	.223*	1		
Industry	-.101	.077	1	
Collection Time	.010	-.016	-.166	1

Notes: n = 141

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

The goal of this study was to identify variables that are most predictive. The relationship between turnover and conflict with managers or supervisors was determined using regression analyses over a more traditional correlation. Regression allows the determination of a change in an outcome variable given the change of predictor variable, when at least one is a fixed measure (Howell, 2002).

For hypotheses 2 and 3, logistic regression analysis was used because the outcome variables were discrete, and the conflict variable was assessed using a single Likert-type scale so it could not be considered interval. Logistic regression is useful for situations in which one wants to be able to predict the presence or absence of a characteristic or outcome based on the values of a set of predictor variables. Rather than predicting a score for a continuous variable the analyses predicts the likelihood of a participant, or in the case of this study an organization, being a member of a particular group. Logistic regression allowed for the estimation of the probability of an employee leaving their organization, given values for each independent variable. The assumptions of the logistic regression model were all met, and are as follows:

- The dependent variable is discrete
- The data are not normally distributed
- Homoscedasticity is not assumed (i.e. the dependent variable are not equal) and
- The data are ordinal or nominal and not continuous (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

In an attempt to understand why individuals leave an organization, this study investigated the contributing role played by conflict between employees and supervisors, and industry type. Detailed organizational ethnographies were utilized for this research, as they were previously coded to allow for data analysis and interpretation. The analysis for the current study was performed using the statistical package SPSS.

Hypothesis 1. Specific data analyses were conducted to address each research question posed in this study. To address the first question regarding the relationship between the employee-supervisor conflict variable and the turnover variable a linear regression analysis was conducted. In the analysis, the five levels of frequency for employee-supervisor conflict were entered as the independent variable with the three levels of turnover as the dependent variable. The mean level of conflict with supervisors was 3.14 ($SD = 1.03$), and the mean for the turnover variable was 2.04 ($SD = .88$). The relationship was shown to be significant, $F(1, 139) = 7.256, p < .01$.

Hypothesis 2. Logistic regression was used to examine the second research question. Logistic regression is well suited for studying the relation between a categorical or qualitative outcome variable and one or more predictor variables. A direct logistic regression was performed with organization turnover level (low, medium, high) as the outcome variable and frequency of conflict with supervisors and the transformed

categories for industry type (manufacturing and non-manufacturing) as the predictor variables. Evaluation of adequacy of expected frequencies for predictors revealed no need to restrict model goodness-of-fit tests (Table 3).

Table 3. Frequencies for Turnover and Conflict Levels.

Variable	<i>N</i>	Marginal Percentage
Turnover		
Low	52	36.9%
Medium	32	22.7%
High	57	40.4%
Conflict with Supervisors		
Never	6	4.3%
Infrequent	37	26.2%
Average	38	27.0%
Frequent	50	35.5%
Constant	10	7.1%
Total	141	100.0%

The logistic regression performed did not support the overall model, chi square χ^2 (10) = 16.326, $p < .10$. The findings of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

It is important to note that when each level of the independent variables were assessed, the only one that made a significant independent contribution was conflict, chi square χ^2 (8) = 15.064, $p < .05$. The industry variable was not a significant improvement to the model. Therefore, the hypothesis was not supported after all.

Table 4. Logistic Regressions on Turnover Level for Conflict and Industry.

Variable	DF	Chi-Square	<i>P</i>
Conflict	8	15.064	.058
Industry	2	1.365	.505
Model	10	16.326	.091
Conflict*Industry	8	9.512	.296

Note: n = 141

Logistic regression also provides odds ratios to help with interpretation of the findings (Table 5). If conflict was not experienced, the level of turnover was seven times (7.488) more likely to be low than high. Infrequent conflict was five times more likely (5.251) to lead to low than to high turnover, seven times more likely to lead to medium levels of turnover than a high level.

Table 5. Parameter Estimates for Conflict with a Superior on Turnover Levels.

Turnover			Standard				Odds
Level*	Variable	B	Error	Wald	DF	p	Ratio
Low	Conflict						
	Never	2.013	1.187	2.875	1	.090	7.488
	Infrequent	1.658	.906	3.348	1	.067	5.251
	Average	1.664	.893	3.473	1	.062	5.279
	Frequent	.739	.875	.712	1	.399	2.093
	Constant*	0**	.	.	1	.	.
Medium	Conflict						
	Never	-17.667	.000	.	1	.	.000
	Infrequent	2.005	1.161	2.984	1	.084	7.427
	Average	1.697	1.161	2.137	1	.144	5.459
	Frequent	1.166	1.134	1.058	1	.304	3.209
	Constant*	0**	.	.	1	.	.

*The reference category is high.

**This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

Even though the overall hypothesis was not supported, logistic regression allows the further exploration of the conflict-turnover relationship. The classification of the model was calculated (Table 6), and on the basis of the five conflict variables with the addition of the industry predictor, the classification success rates for the turnover levels were low, 43.2%, medium, 42.3%, and high, 56.5%. The overall classification was 48.6%, and with a baseline of chance at 33.3%, the percent over chance was 15.3%. The chi-square was calculated for the cells in the table $\chi^2 (4) = 10.684, p < .05$.

Table 6. Classification Table for Model with Conflict and Industry.

Observed	Predicted			Percent Correct
	Low	Medium	High	
Low	16	71	14	43.2%
Medium	4	11	11	42.3%
High	10	10	26	56.5%
Overall Percentage	27.5%	25.7%	46.8%	48.6%

Hypothesis 3. A direct logistic regression was again performed with turnover level (low, medium, high) as the outcome variable and frequency of conflict with superiors (never, infrequent, average, frequent, constant) and time of data collection (Time 1 and Time 2) as the predictor variables. Evaluation of adequacy of expected frequencies for categorical demographic predictors revealed no need to restrict model goodness-of-fit tests.

As predicted, this research question was not significant, with a chi square χ^2 (10) = 13.304 and the findings are presented in Table 7. The odds ratios show similar findings as in the second hypothesis. There was a significant likelihood that the three lowest levels of conflict, never, infrequent, and average, would lead to the lowest level of turnover, 7.294, 4.833, and 5.088, respectively.

Table 7. Logistic Regression for Turnover with Conflict and Time.

Variable	DF	Chi-Square	P
Conflict	8	13.262	.103
Time	2	.082	.960
Model	10	13.304	.207
Conflict*Time	8	5.276	.728
Conflict*Industry*Time	10	10.918	.364

Note: n = 141

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The average annual turnover rate in the United States has risen to 15 percent, with certain industries claiming rates of 31 percent and even up to 63 percent, at call centers and fast food, respectively. These severely troubled companies are replacing over 6.5 million employees with turnover costs at more than \$75 billion (Nextera, 2000). The costs related, other than payroll and recruitment costs, are due to reduced effectiveness and increased expenses as valuable, and irreplaceable, intellectual capital is lost and new individuals have to be trained to take over the positions (Hillmer, 2004). This tendency does not give the impression that it will disappear any time soon, as many individuals enter an organization with the idea that they will not remain at their current job for more than one year (Miller, 1997).

A multitude of factors contribute to turnover in organizations, but several of them, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions are the focus of a large portion of the literature. Data on these factors is plentiful, but what is harder to determine are the underlying causal components that contribute to each. It is the understanding of these lower level issues that can allow organizations to decide how to solve the problem and not just identify it.

Conflict has been recognized as a pervasive issue within organizations, with effects that contribute to the strongest turnover predictors (Frone, 2000, Medina et al., 2005, Spector & Jex, 1998). Conflict between coworkers can of course be problematic,

but the special relationship between the employee and his or her supervisor adds a level of complication for the organization. The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between levels of employee-supervisor conflict and the levels of turnover in the organization, and to compare this relationship in manufacturing and non-manufacturing industries.

The data presented in this study make an important contribution toward understanding turnover, and factors that may contribute. This study utilized a resource that has not been fully tapped -- the realm of workplace ethnographies. Having hundreds of English-language, book length, observations by PhD level individuals, that often span a year's time, should be a gold mine of valuable data. A level of observation so deep allows a look at an organization's culture and intricacies that most research cannot obtain through self-report data (Hodson, 1998). This study attempted to take advantage of this resource by utilizing the ethnographies to answer the proposed research questions.

The first research question was posed to determine if there was a base relationship between the frequency of conflict with supervisors and the level of turnover experienced at the organization. The previous literature has identified that higher levels of conflict contribute to decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions, and that these same factors are significant predictors of higher levels of turnover (Medina et al., 2005, Spector & Jex, 1998). It has also been discussed that conflict between coworkers leads to poor psychological outcomes, while conflict between employees and their supervisors or management have poor organizational outcomes.

Few studies have realized the importance of separating these relationships. By only assessing the overall conflict within an organization, the important dynamic that exists between an employee and his/her supervisor is lost. (Frone, 2000). This study provided support for the logical conclusion, that conflict with a supervisor or management leads to higher turnover levels.

Workforces will continue to grow and diversify, and people will always have goals, values, and commitments that differ from the other employees in the organization. It is when the differences with a superior become more frequent that an employee decides to leave. Some of the hardest findings to digest are those that report on an issue that is too difficult to affect, but conflict is manageable. And now that the specific employee-superior relationship has proven significant by itself, organizations can focus on training their management staff members on how to respond to and manage conflict as it arises. If managers and supervisors are equipped with the appropriate skills then the issues can often be quashed and resolved before the situation escalates. By managing the conflict properly, organizations may in fact be able to reduce their turnover level.

The other main focus of this study was on the differences in the conflict-turnover relationship between manufacturing and non-manufacturing, or service, industries. The prevalent literature on turnover is often focused on companies and occupations in the service industry, such as nursing, hotels, and call centers as they often have some of the highest rates (Van Dick et al., 2004, Woods, 1997). Turnover in these organizations seems to be particularly troublesome as the main form of capital is held in the

employees themselves. When such companies lose their intellectual capital, the success of the organization is often at risk (Mor Barak et al., 2001, Nasurdin et al., April 11, 2007).

Hypothesis 2, predicted that the relationship between employee-superior conflict and turnover would be greater in these non-manufacturing industries, yet it was not supported. The analysis performed found that the overall model did not hold true at a significant level but did successfully predicted which group of turnover the organization would fall into. The industry variable was not a significant addition. This does not support all of the literature, but does provide those organizations that have seen high turnover rates with a possible cause that they can identify and work to reduce. This conclusion seems to engender the idea that there is not one industry type that is immune from turnover or conflict, and that they all need to carefully consider how to retain their employees.

The second analyses did allow for the conflict variable to be broken down by the logistic regression, and the resulting odds ratios explained the relationship in more detail. When there was no evidence of conflict the level of turnover was twenty-eight times more likely to be low than high and infrequent conflict was seven times more likely to lead to medium than to high turnover. This is to be expected, but when the level of conflict was perceived to be average, the level of turnover went back to about eight times the likelihood to be in the low level of turnover than in the high level. This finding supports the line of thought that some amount of conflict can stimulate employees to increase their abilities, and express divergent opinions to increase productivity and

quality of work; therefore conflict can be an effective part of work that does not necessarily lead to turnover (Work 911, April 28, 2007). Beyond that, higher levels of conflict do lead to higher levels of turnover. It is a fine line that managers will have to pay attention to, so if the line is crossed where conflict becomes disruptive then they can work to manage it properly.

Fortunately, the model clearly predicted group membership successfully above chance for all three of the turnover groups, with the overall classification at 15.3 percent over chance. An even better discovery was that the best group classification rate was for the highest level of turnover with a prediction over 23 percent better than chance. This clearly supports the prediction of this study by using the increasing level of employee-superior conflict to successfully predict an increased level of turnover.

The final research question addressed was Hypothesis 3. It was tested to authenticate the findings for the study from Time 1 to Time 2. Since the data was collected from ethnographies, which may lead to skepticism on the level of reliability, it was important to find out if there were any changes in the collection process from the first time period in the 90s and the second in the early 2000s. The hypothesis was supported and time was not a significant predictor of turnover level. Also, the relationship between conflict with superiors and turnover level was again seen in the odds ratios, proving the relationship was not a random event, or due to any type of methodological error, but occurred on more than one occasion.

Study Strengths and Limitations

Using data collected from organization ethnographies is both a strength and a limitation. This type of data is a strength for the study, as it represents real world data from true populations of employees, diverse in age, ethnicity, and occupation, and does not rely on the typical study participants, also known as, university students. Also, the data were collected through direct observation, which eliminates the limitations associated with self-report data, such as social desirability. Finally, the use of two data collection periods provides a more representative sample as it can balance any economic issues, or other external factors, that can play a part in the role of turnover.

Despite the support for some of the tested hypotheses, there were a few limitations of the study that should be addressed. First, the ethnographic data is not a sample representative of the true population, but rather a sample of convenience since the cases were drawn only from the existing ethnography literature. And even though validity checks showed no evidence that the ethnographer's theoretical orientation, characteristics, or coder effects influenced the findings overall, they are in fact observations requiring inference on part of the observer and not the report of the employees themselves (Hodson, 1998).

Finally, logistic regression is not the most powerful statistical analysis, and it does not prove causality. Though logistic regression allows for a variety of variables to be used in the analyses, proving that variables successfully predict the outcome variable does not mean that you can conclude that the predictor variable causes the outcome variable. This means that a definitive conclusion can not be made as there

may in fact be other variables that are affecting the outcome along with conflict, and that conflict alone does not cause turnover. Further research is needed to determine true causality.

Future Research

There is still a great deal of research to be done on the relationships examined in this study in the future, and for those who continue to study these intricate variables, a few thoughts. The questions on the data collection instrument that dealt with the two main variables were three and five point Likert-type scales. It was also noticed that the median score for each fell in the middle category. It may have been easier for the coder to choose the nondescript middle than to make the hard decision to lean one way or another. In the future, research may want to use four or six point scales to force a conclusion.

Organizational ethnographies are a great resource for investigating new theories and confirming existing ones, which both can truly contribute to the industry. The important point is to note that the research should be considered to be more of an exploratory nature. As there are some limitations due to the data collection through third party observation, future research using this data source should be followed up by, or combined with, more rigorous methods of analysis such as surveys and quasi-experimental designs. This allowed for strengthened results and conclusions to be drawn from the data.

Also, the research presented here was focused at the organization level. It would definitely benefit companies to see research findings from studies focused on the

individual. There may be more details and conclusions to draw out in that case. In addition, as the industry variable did not prove significant, perhaps a more detailed breakdown of occupation might prove the theory that service oriented jobs see higher levels of turnover.

Practical Implications

With the findings presented in this study organizations should take a look at what they can do to reduce the levels of conflict. Finding help with conflict management is not a difficult task as the literature and training world are filled with suggestions for organizations and its managers on what they can do to reduce the amount of conflict experienced. Some include: not allowing the conflict to build, avoiding it if possible, managing the conflict and its effects if it does escalate, and trying to adopt a reasonable approach through trying new techniques and changing conflict management styles if it does not work (Wall & Callister, 1995). Companies should take advantage of these resources available and make an effort to reduce conflict. Conflict resolution classes for all management positions would be a course that can be purchased and taught within the organization to save on training costs. A little time and effort before an individual takes a position of authority would save the company in a multitude of ways including reduced turnover and the considerable costs associated. Not only could they affect their bottom line but their employees' well-being as well. It was shown the job satisfaction and organizational commitment were predictors of turnover, so if employees want to

stay with the company then perhaps they will be more satisfied. Turnover is no longer a problem that cannot be addressed. A real, addressable cause was identified in this study. Now it is up to organizations to do their part.

Conclusions. Overall the findings of the current study provide a look at organization turnover that has not previously been much of a focus in the literature. Pinpointing the superior-subordinate relationship in workplace conflict and its affect on organizational turnover takes it beyond much of the past research that deals largely with the prediction success that job satisfaction, organization commitment, and turnover intentions. This study has identified a factor in turnover than can easily be addressed and reformed to make a difference. Hopefully, the findings will reach organizations and lead them to invest in conflict management training and support for their employees, specifically those in manager or supervisor positions.

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