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Eight Motivational Forces and Voluntary Turnover: A Theoretical Synthesis with Implications for Research

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In this study, we synthesize, from the attitude and turnover literatures, a framework of eight (8) distinctive motives, or “Forces”. We then illustrate how the “8 Forces” framework can be utilized by turnover researchers as clarification of reported reasons for turnover, as causal mediators of turnover predictors, and as factors related to the type of turnover decision process. Finally, we discuss further implications of this framework.

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Over the last half century, turnover researchers have identified a dizzying array of antecedent variables that are scattered throughout the turnover and work attitude literatures (e.g., Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000; Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia & Griffeth, 1992; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Unfortunately though, there is no overarching framework available for researchers and practitioners hoping to comprehensively grasp the motivations for staying and leaving an organization. Although predictive models abound, gaps in theory remain.

First, even the most extensive turnover/attachment models (e.g., Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand & Meglino, 1979) have neglected or underestimated some important antecedents (Maertz & Campion, 1998; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski & Erez, 2001), like relationships with coworkers and leaders, normative expectations of family and friends, behavioral commitment processes, and the psychological contract (Becker, 1992; Prestholdt, Lane & Matthews, 1987; Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994; Salancik, 1977; Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997). Such omissions are partially caused by failing to fully

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integrate commitment constructs with turnover models. Without this integration, models risk empirical estimation problems caused by omitting relevant causal variables (James, 1982), perhaps contributing to the problem of low explained variance in turnover behavior (e.g., Hom et al., 1992).

Second, Mitchell et al. (2001) showed that employees become “embedded” within the organization and community, with incremental effects on turnover beyond satisfaction and commitment. This embeddedness purportedly comes about through three antecedents: linkages, perceptions of fit, and desire to avoid sacrifices of leaving. However, these three proposed antecedents for embeddedness may be deficient. Thus, theoretical expansion may be needed in order to fully understand how embeddedness forms and relates to existing predictors.

Third, for many predictors, research has not specified exactly what motivational process causes psychological attachment or withdrawal tendency (Mitchell et al., 2001), and thereby, what drives the empirical relationship. For instance, work–family conflict (WFC) is positively related to turnover intentions (Burke, 1988), but theory has yet to explain exactly why work interfering with family would cause one to quit (cf. Hom & Kinicki, 2001). Normative expectations of family about turnover would seem to be relevant in linking WFC and turnover intention (e.g., Fishbein & Azjen, 1975), but no such mediator has been proposed. Specifying motivational mechanisms behind predictors is critical for better understanding turnover, but this is often not done.

Fourth, researchers have not adequately differentiated all the motivational effects within groups of highly correlated predictors. For instance, global job satisfaction, organizational identification, value congruence/fit, perceived organizational support, and organizational commitment are all positively correlated with each other and negatively correlated with turnover intention (e.g., Tett & Meyer, 1993). Clearly, these constructs are capturing positive feelings regarding the organization, but what other distinct, non-affective motives are being captured? For example, perceived organizational support not only drives positive affect, but also creates a personal obligation toward the organization (Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli, 2001). In sum, theory has not specified the number of separate motives represented in this cluster of constructs.

Finally, there is often conceptual overlap among such affect-loaded constructs (Morrow, 1983) as well as between commitment and turnover intentions (Bozeman & Perrewé, 2001). One contributing factor is that researchers, pursuing various goals, introduce new variables as predictors without having identified how these contribute in a unique way to turnover motivation. This confuses the nomological net surrounding turnover causes (Hom & Griffith, 1991).

To address these gaps in theory and this proliferation of constructs, we synthesize a conceptual framework that provides a relatively comprehensive, yet parsimonious, explanation of why employees quit (and stay with) organizations. No existing model does this. In addition, the framework extends the current research by (1) identifying psychological mechanisms behind reported reasons for quitting, (2) providing theoretical building blocks to analyze the causal effects of predictors on turnover, (3) complementing advances in turnover process theory, and (4) providing a theoretical step toward developing a comprehensive measure of turnover motives. Such a measure would allow fully-specified empirical model tests and would facilitate targeted interventions for turnover management (Table 1).

The Eight Motivational Forces

Motivation is considered to be that which causes: level of effort allocated to, persistence in, and initiation of behavior (Kanfer, 1990). Here, motivation initiates engagement in the mental behavior of turnover deliberations and the physical behavior of actually resigning/quitting. Our goal was to be both comprehensive and parsimonious in synthesizing a framework of distinct motives for turnover (Hom & Griffeth, 1991). As a result of this synthesis, we propose that eight (8) motive categories, or “forces”, drive decisions about whether to stay or leave an organization.

The idea that psychological forces motivate behavior is not new. Lewin reasoned that if the “motions of physical objects are governed by physical forces, why can’t the “wants” and “intentions” of an individual, whether they be conscious or unconscious, be represented as psychological forces acting on the individual to produce the changes we observe in behavior . . .” (Atkinson, 1964: 77–78).

We propose that events, memories recalled, and other cognitions trigger conscious deliberations about organizational membership (e.g., “Should I stay or should I go?”). Such deliberations involve cognitive self-questioning and responding. “How does working here

Table 1
Forces and motivational mechanisms

Type of force	Motivational mechanism for attachment and withdrawal
Affective forces	Hedonistic approach–avoidance mechanism. Positive/negative emotional responses toward the organization cause psychological comfort or discomfort with membership. Emotional comfort motivates approach or staying; discomfort motivates avoidance or quitting.
Calculative forces	Rational calculation of the probability of attaining important values and goals in the future through continued membership. Favorable calculation of future value/goal attainment at the current organization motivates staying. Unfavorable calculation of future value/goal attainment motivates quitting.
Contractual forces	Perceived obligations to stay with the organization under the psychological contract or withdrawal response to organizational breaches of the psychological contract. These depend on a norm of reciprocity.
Behavioral forces	Desire to avoid the explicit and psychological costs of quitting brought on by investments in membership or by past behaviors that favor/oppose membership. Higher costs motivate staying, while lower costs or behaviors opposing membership motivate quitting.
Alternative forces	Magnitude and strength of self-efficacy beliefs about obtaining alternative jobs/roles: the level of valued outcomes that may be provided by alternatives and the certainty of obtaining these alternatives. Lower S-E → staying; higher S-E → quitting.
Normative forces	Meeting the perceived expectations of salient others outside the organization that include or imply either staying or quitting, assuming some motivation to comply with these expectations.
Moral/ethical forces	Maintaining consistency between behavior and values regarding turnover. These values range from “quitting is bad/persistence is a virtue” to “changing jobs regularly is good/staying long causes stagnation”.
Constituent forces	Motivation to remain or quit depends on the employee’s attachment to individual coworkers or groups within the organization. Attachment to the constituent means attachment to the organization, unless the constituent shows signs of leaving.

make me feel?; What are my future prospects at this organization for meeting my goals?; Do I owe any obligation to this organization to stay?; What would I lose by leaving?; Do I have better alternatives to working here?; What do my family members and my friends expect me to do?; Is quitting the ‘right’ thing to do?; And, how strong are my attachments to people in the organization?” These questions and the associated emotional and cognitive responses create motivational forces to either stay with or quit the current organization. The resultant of these forces determines the employee’s level of intention to stay/quit the organization at any given point in time, and it motivates an employee’s final decision to quit vs. stay.

Affective Forces: Hedonistic Approach–Avoidance Based on Emotion

Affective forces are a motivational tendency involving emotions aroused by the organization and membership in it. Whenever an employee thinks about the organization an emotional response is possible. Such current and salient emotional responses comprise affective forces at a given point in time. The mechanism influencing turnover involves a hedonistic approach–avoidance response. We assume that people are generally hedonistic, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. As a result, people tend to approach situations that make them feel good and avoid situations that make them feel bad. That is, an employee who feels good about the current organization and enjoys membership wants this pleasurable emotion to continue and is thereby motivated to continue membership (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Conversely, a person who feels negative toward the organization will want to avoid the psychological discomfort associated with working there (e.g., Rosse & Hulin, 1985). In sum, the mechanism is: affective response toward the organization causes either pleasure or discomfort → approach or avoidance.

Clearly, affective forces are a big part of what is captured in the pervasive measures of affective organizational commitment (Meyer, Allen & Smith 1993; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979). However, such measures also may reflect intention to remain, organizational identification, and value congruence (Bozeman & Perrewe, 2001), and the commitment construct does not express this approach–avoidance mechanism explicitly (Mowday et al., 1979). Thus, affective forces are closely related but not equivalent to affective commitment.

Calculative Forces: Expectations Regarding the Future Benefits of Membership

Calculative forces involve a cognitive evaluation of one’s future prospects of membership in the organization. Specifically, “Can I meet my goals and values through future membership at this organization?” The motivational force depends on this calculation. A calculation that one can achieve valued goals through continued membership creates motivation to stay (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). A calculation that valued goals are unlikely to be met at the current organization in the future creates motivation to quit (e.g., Mobley et al., 1979).

Unlike affective forces that include current emotion, calculative forces are based on rational self-interest with a future orientation. Mobley et al. (1979) suggested that a future-orientated calculation is relevant in explaining turnover beyond the effects of current

attitudes. Employees may feel positive about the organization presently, but also may be worried about their future prospects at the company. Conversely, an employee may hate the current job (e.g., manager trainee), but know that remaining with the organization is in his or her long-term interest (becoming a manager). Also, an employee may want to avoid current costs of leaving the organization (behavioral force of attachment), but also calculate that the chances of fulfilling future career objectives there are low (calculative force to quit). These same employees may have either high or low self-efficacy for obtaining alternative jobs (alternative forces). Thus, calculative forces are distinct from affective, behavioral, and alternative forces; we discuss the latter two after contractual forces.

Contractual Forces: Perceived Obligation under or Breach of the Psychological Contract

Contractual forces involve perceptions of what is owed to the organization by the employee and owed by the organization to the employee. Those considering turnover often ask themselves, “Do I owe any obligation to the organization that I would break by leaving?” Perceived obligations to stay with the organization have been labeled normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991) and negatively related to turnover intentions (Shore, Tetrick, Shore & Barksdale, 2000). The theorized psychological contract encompasses these obligations, along with what is owed to the employee by the organization (Rousseau, 1989). The psychological contract is characterized by a reciprocal exchange, whereby each party maintains its side of the bargain only to the extent that the other party does (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Employee obligations to the organization under this contract may arise from its prepayments to employees, its fulfillment of promises and fair treatment, or other forms of perceived organizational support (e.g., Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch & Rhoades, 2001). Such conscious obligations “act(s) to hold a person into a particular system until the debt is repaid” (Settoon, Bennett & Liden, 1996: 220), if the employee adheres to a norm of reciprocity (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Paying back the organization would imply some continuing membership, and thus, increased psychological attachment. Employees may even perceive that they are directly paying back an obligation through continued membership (Robinson et al., 1994). Thus, contractual forces of attachment are perceived obligations to the organization that include or imply staying.

A perceived breach of the psychological contract is an employee’s cognition that the organization has failed in one or more of its obligations to the employee (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Any breach reduces or negates obligations that employees feel they owe, including obligations to stay (Robinson et al., 1994; Turnley & Feldman, 2000). In fact, the employee may perceive a betrayal and feel obligated to “even the score” or strike back at the organization by quitting. Thus, contractual forces of withdrawal range from ‘no obligation to stay’ to ‘perceived obligation to quit’.

A psychological contract breach can also produce strong negative feelings of anger and betrayal, called violation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997), particularly when employees perceive purposeful renegeing by the organization (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). However, employees may feel no obligation to an organization and still like that organization. Further, psychological contract breaches can have incremental effects on outcomes beyond affect-loaded measures (Turnley & Feldman, 2000). Thus, contractual and affective forces are positively related but distinct mechanisms.

Behavioral Forces: Tangible and Psychological Costs of Leaving the Organization

Behavioral forces involve perceived costs associated with leaving the current organization. Employees considering membership decisions are almost certain to ask themselves, “What are my costs of quitting this organization?” The desire to avoid these costs represents an important rational motive. At the heart of it, individuals are bound to “consistent lines of activity” by past behaviors (Becker, 1960). These past behaviors, or “side bets,” create or imply costs of leaving (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Recent research indicates that these binding costs may be economic like vested pension benefits, or adjustment-related like sacrificing the benefit of company-specific training and tenure (Shore et al., 2000).

For Salancik (1977) the costs of leaving were psychological, involving potential dissonance brought on by volitional, explicit, irreversible, and public behaviors favoring the organization or membership in it. For example, if an employee publicly extols the virtues of an organization or freely chooses the organization over many other possibilities (O’Reilly & Caldwell, 1981), the employee would normally experience psychological costs if he or she plans to quit. These costs can be reduced or avoided by staying. Reducing these psychological costs may produce a distinctive motive from avoiding economic costs. This should be tested in empirical research. Still, the common motivational mechanism for behavioral forces of attachment is an employee’s desire to avoid these explicit and psychological costs associated with leaving.

Conversely, perceiving no significant costs of leaving can create a perception of freedom from organizational ties that itself facilitates quitting (Shore et al., 2000). Also, for those exhibiting negative behaviors with respect to (membership in) the organization (e.g., publicly criticizing the organization, job searching), staying implies psychological costs that can be reduced by quitting. Thus, the motivational mechanism behind behavioral forces for turnover involves perceiving no explicit costs of quitting, or perceiving psychological costs of staying due to past negative behaviors.

Employees can perceive costs of leaving one organization whether or not they consider alternative jobs/or roles at all. Also, McGee and Ford (1987) showed that perceived costs and perceived job alternatives were empirically distinct. Thus, behavioral forces are conceptually and empirically distinct from alternative forces.

Alternative Forces: Self-Efficacy Beliefs About Alternative Jobs or Roles

Alternative forces involve an employee’s beliefs about their ability to obtain a valued alternative to working at the current organization. Employees facing membership decisions are likely to ask themselves, “Do I have any job alternatives, how good are they, or at least, what else will I do if I quit this job?” People would normally want to avoid the employment uncertainty brought on by quitting without another job in hand (Hulin, Roznowski & Hachiya, 1985; March & Simon, 1959; Steel, 2002).

Desire to minimize employment uncertainty is one side of the motivational mechanism and attraction is the other. Job alternatives may act to psychologically pull employees away from their current organization out of self-interest (Bretz, Boudreau & Judge, 1994). Even if employees like the organization (affective attachment), they may still be strongly attracted

to alternatives that they believe will provide better work outcomes (e.g., Steel, 2002). This attraction may be based on vague news about the job market or a definite job offer. It is important to remember that employees may be strongly attracted to alternative *non-work* roles as well.

The motivational construct of self-efficacy captures both the uncertainty avoidance and attraction sides of the alternative forces' mechanism. Self-efficacy "refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action necessary to meet situational demands" (Wood & Bandura, 1989: 408). Here, this means beliefs about capabilities for obtaining valued alternative jobs/roles. Task self-efficacy has two main sub-dimensions, magnitude and strength. Magnitude is the belief in the level of accomplishment that can be attained, and strength is the belief in the certainty of achieving that level of accomplishment (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Alternative forces are self-efficacy beliefs about the *level*, or quality of job alternatives that can be obtained, combined with the *certainty* of obtaining those alternatives. We argue that in actual employment decisions, one would be unlikely to consider the certainty of obtaining an alternative without weighing the level of benefit it could provide and vice versa. Thus, as the magnitude or strength of alternative forces increases, there is a greater motivation to quit. As the magnitude or strength decreases, there is a greater motivation to remain.

Normative Forces: Expectations of Family or Friends Regarding Turnover Behavior

Normative forces involve an employee's perceptions of what family or friends outside the organization expect him/her to do with respect to turnover behavior. Compared to most common decisions, employment decisions have a high potential impact on the lives of family, friends, and colleagues outside the organization. Employees are likely to ask themselves, "Do my family members and friends want/expect me to stay or to leave this organization?" Such normative expectations have demonstrated even stronger relationships with turnover intentions than work attitudes (Hom, Katerberg & Hulin, 1979; Prestholdt et al., 1987). Yet, normative expectations have been ignored in many turnover models. Here, we define normative forces as the employee's perceived expectations from family or friends regarding his/her turnover decision (e.g., Fishbein & Azjen, 1975).

For these perceived expectations to influence the employee, he or she must be motivated to comply with these expectations (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975). For example, suppose a friend of your father helps you get a specific job offer. You now may perceive that both your father and his friend expect you to remain with the organization for awhile. If you want to comply with their expectations, you would be motivated to stay. With zero motivation to comply, the expectations would be unimportant and would have no effect on your turnover intentions. If you wanted to actively defy their expectations, *turnover* motivation would result.

Different normative forces may also conflict because they include perceptions regarding spouses, dependents, friends, and other family members. Your spouse may expect you to stay in the current organization, while your mother wants you to get a job closer to her. The net influence on turnover deliberations would depend on the relative intensity of the two expectations and the level of motivation to comply with each. Opposing forces may even cancel out, resulting in no net motivational effect on turnover.

Moral Forces: Consistency with a General Value Regarding Turnover Behavior

Moral forces involve an employee's values regarding turnover behavior in general. While normative forces depend on perceived expectations of others, moral forces are based on an internalized value. Although absent in turnover models, there is some precedent for such an internalized value influencing behavioral intention (i.e., Triandis, 1975). One key turnover-related value is "persistence is good for its own sake". The Protestant Work Ethic (PWE) and other religious/moral traditions hold that it is good to persevere and work hard regardless of circumstances (e.g., Blau & Ryan, 1997; Niles, 1999). This value implies that being fickle by "job-hopping" is morally deficient or indicative of weak character.

The opposite end of the value spectrum holds that changing jobs is good (e.g., "variety is the spice of life"). This may be based on careerism (e.g., Dougherty, Dreher & Whitely, 1993), on the trait of openness to experience, or on an instinctive movement impulse driving Ghiselli's (1974) hobo syndrome (e.g., Judge & Watanabe, 1995).

Assuming that the employee holds one of these values concerning turnover behavior, there is a potential psychological mechanism impacting turnover. That is, people want to believe that they act consistently with their values (Festinger, 1957). Maintaining consistency with values makes people believe that they have done right and been true to themselves. Thus, maintaining consistency with a "persistence is good" value constitutes a motive for attachment. Consistency with a "change is good" value constitutes a motive for withdrawal.

Constituent Forces: Attachment to/Desire to Withdraw from People in the Organization

Constituent forces involve an employee's relationships with individuals or groups within the organization. Reichers (1985) theorized that employees become committed to constituents within an organization, separate from commitment to the organization itself. There is considerable evidence that this is true. Specifically, relationships with constituents have demonstrated empirical effects on turnover cognitions (e.g., Graen, Liden & Hoel, 1982; Krackhardt & Porter, 1985), and influence such outcomes even beyond the effects of organizational commitment (Becker, 1992; Maertz, Mosley & Alford, 2002; Settoon et al., 1996; Wayne et al., 1997). More recently, Mitchell et al. (2001) found that attachments to people or groups apart from the organization itself demonstrated incremental validity over job satisfaction, organizational commitment, perceived alternatives and job search in predicting actual turnover behavior. This proves that constituent forces may be a value-add to turnover models theoretically and empirically, beyond organization-level forces. Attachment to constituents would typically indicate attachment to the organization, as long as the employee perceives that the constituent in question is attached to the organization. That is, employee attachment to a constituent may turn into a force for the employee to withdraw from the organization if that constituent announces plans to quit. Finally, work by Clugston, Howell and Dorfman (2000) and Meyer et al. (1993) indicates that constituent forces may be multidimensional in the same way that organizational forces are multidimensional (e.g., affective, normative, constituent).

Relationships Among the 8 Forces

There are several different ways in which the 8 forces are interrelated. First, they may change concurrently due to events and cognitions. For instance, realizing that a promise for a promotion has been broken through a company decision may affect multiple organizational forces. Specifically, affect toward the organization would likely become more negative, assessments of future prospects with the organization would also diminish, and certainly contractual obligations to the organization would decrease. Moreover, if certain managers are perceived to have contributed to the broken promise, constituent attachments could be lessened. The fact that events and realizations trigger changes in multiple forces would certainly cause correlation among the forces. Thus, we would expect moderate positive correlations among the forces that directly relate to the organization (i.e., affective, calculative, contractual, and behavioral) and small positive correlations between these and the remaining four forces.

Second, as one consciously considers turnover, the motivating forces may interact such that they exacerbate or mitigate the effects of other forces. For example, having nothing to lose by leaving (low behavioral attachment) may cause alternative opportunities to become more salient possibilities, and thus, more predictive of turnover behavior. It has also been argued that job satisfaction (affect) will influence turnover more when opportunities are perceived to be good or plentiful (Hom et al., 1992). These arguments imply an empirical interaction between affective and alternative forces in predicting turnover. Certainly other interactions may also exist.

Third, the forces may simply oppose each other; that is, act in opposite directions. Often when a major relocation is implied, attraction to alternative opportunities may be opposed by normative forces of family members who want to stay in the current community. Here, alternative and normative forces are in opposition and can both affect the final decision. Values about work and family may help determine which motive proves stronger in a particular case. In general, the way that the forces correlate with each other, change together over time, interact with each other to predict turnover, and conflict with each other are fruitful areas for future research.

Research Implications of the Framework

There are at least three major areas wherein this framework can further contribute to turnover research: (1) reported reasons for turnover, (2) mediating mechanisms linking predictor variables to turnover, and (3) content-process model integration.

The 8 Forces and Reported Reasons for Quitting

Reported reasons for quitting (e.g., I quit because . . .) are explanations of turnover behavior constructed in the mind of an employee, usually after the fact, and then expressed verbally. These reasons are first-degree constructs, which may depend on idiosyncratic categorizations and/or implicit theories about turnover (Calder, 1977). The subjective and unreliable nature of such explanations creates difficulty in comparing or aggregating them

across employees. Employees may even construct and report reasons without conscious realization or memory of their proximal motives at the time. Thus, it is difficult to create a “model of reasons” that validly expresses the forces, and it is impossible to establish a one-to-one linkage between reasons and the forces.

However, if employees can remember and clarify their reasons in enough detail, researchers can discover the motivational forces behind them. Based on such responses, multiple experts could empirically link each reason to one or more of the forces. In future empirical studies inter-rater agreement indices could be calculated to test the reliability with which reasons can be linked to the 8 forces.

The 8 Forces as Causal Mediators of Predictors

We must re-emphasize that motives are not the same as the attitudinal variables (e.g., job satisfaction facets) and perceptual variables (e.g., organizational justice) that are used to predict turnover. There are many such turnover predictors (Griffeth et al., 2000) but each does not represent a distinct causal force affecting turnover. In fact, it is often unclear in many studies precisely *why* empirical relationships occur. For instance, low job satisfaction scores do not directly cause quitting. One must experience emotion-driven avoidance, attraction to alternatives, or some other motive emanating from dissatisfaction (e.g., Mobley, 1977). Likewise, there must be some intervening motivational mechanisms that causally link other predictors to turnover. The 8 forces framework is a synthesis of such mechanisms. Accordingly, we demonstrate with two established predictors of turnover intentions, how the 8 forces framework can be used to theoretically explain the empirical relationship and thereby formulate causal mediation hypotheses. These two are only examples, chosen for their high visibility in the organizational research. This type of analysis using the 8 forces as mediators is possible for all predictors, but space limitations restrict our discussion to two.

Work–family conflict. Work–family conflict has been linked to turnover intentions (Burke, 1988) but research has not detailed the specific causal mechanism behind this effect. Hom and Kinicki (2001) found that interrole conflict affected withdrawal cognitions indirectly through job dissatisfaction and feelings of resentment toward the organization (affective). Second, WFC may reduce calculations of meeting goals of a balanced lifestyle at the current organization (calculative). Third, if work interferes with the employee fulfilling family responsibilities, the family’s quality of life can suffer (Frone, Yardley & Markel, 1997). To resolve the work–family conflict, family members may expect or encourage the employee to quit (Lee & Maurer, 1999). These normative forces may also operate when work interferes with friendship roles. Thus, work–family conflict effects on turnover may be mediated through affective, calculative, and normative forces.

Job performance. Job performance has been found to have a moderate negative correlation with turnover, indicating that good performers are more likely to stay and poor performers are more likely to quit (e.g., Griffeth et al., 2000). Allen and Griffeth (2001) concluded that good job performance affects turnover through two opposing mechanisms: decreasing the desirability of movement and increasing the perceived ease of movement.

The negative effect on desirability of movement is strengthened by the organization providing performance-contingent rewards (Allen & Griffeth, 2001; Harrison, Virick & William, 1996). Several forces explain this effect. Good performance feedback is a signal to the employee that he or she is valued by the organization, particularly under performance-contingent pay. This would lead the good performer to anticipate a better probability that he/she can meet compensation/advancement goals and would cause positive feelings toward the organization. Poor performers would see grimmer prospects and experience more negative affect. Thus, good job performance creates calculative and affective forces for attachment, especially under contingent pay.

However, good performers may also be more likely to quit than average performers, especially if their performance is visible to potential alternative employers (Allen & Griffeth, 2001; Trevor, Gerhart & Boudreau, 1997). A signal of value that good performance feedback provides may cause employees (and recruiters) to realize that they would be valuable to other organizations as well (Trevor, 2001). Thus, good performance can increase their self-efficacy that they can get a better job and could lead to actual job offers. Thus, good and visible performance can create alternative forces for turnover.

Also, contractual forces of attachment to the organization may actually be reduced as performance increases. The employee may feel that he/she, through good performance, has contributed to the organization and thereby met contractual obligations to it. They may feel that the organization owes them, particularly if performance is not compensated aggressively. In either case, good job performance could create contractual forces for turnover, mitigated by effective pay-for-performance plans.

Integration of the 8 Forces with the Decision Process

A key process parameter is whether the employee has an alternative job offer when he/she makes the final decision to quit the organization (e.g., Michaels & Spector, 1982). If not, the decision focuses more on reassessing attachment to the current organization (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). In this case, all forces of attachment to the current organization are weighed against all forces to leave. Thus, when an employee has no specific alternative in hand, forces of attachment are likely weighed against forces for turnover to determine staying vs. quitting.

In contrast, when a specific alternative offer is in hand, decisions come to be framed as a choice between the current organization and the alternative organization(s) (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). It becomes a more rational comparison process than when there is uncertainty about an alternative. The nature of alternative forces changes in this case. First, for alternative forces the certainty component of self-efficacy would be 100% and would drop out as an effect on turnover. Second, because the employee is likely to know many specific attributes of the alternative job and organization, the magnitude/quality component of alternative forces expands to include multiple forces of attraction to the alternative. These forces of attraction to the alternative may consist of affective, calculative, behavioral, normative, contractual, and constituent components. For example, the employee can be emotionally attracted to the alternative organization and believe it will facilitate important career goals. The employee may believe that he/she will lose opportunities by saying “no” to the alternative. The employee’s family may want or expect some aspect of the alternative (e.g., geographic

location) and so on. Finally, the employee compares all these forces of alternative attraction vs. the forces of attachment to the current organization to determine his/her level of turnover intention and final decision to stay or quit.

Moreover, because this comparative process is more controlled, rational, and based on self-interest (Lee & Mitchell, 1994), the relative salience of the forces may also be different based on decision type. Because calculative forces and behavioral forces are both based on rational self-interest, these forces of attachment would be particularly important to compare with forces of attraction to the alternative. Normative expectations from family and friends may represent significant outcomes in the non-work domain. In fact, having a definite alternative may cause others to vocalize expectations about turnover of which the employee was not previously aware, making normative expectations more salient.

In contrast, affective forces may be relatively less influential because of the focus on rational choice over emotion. An employee with a job offer in hand is likely to have actively pursued the alternative and already overcome or discounted prohibitive contractual forces or moral forces of attachment, if any existed. That is, a person considering an actual offer would be less likely to have a strong obligation to stay with the current organization or a strong adherence to a value that “quitting is bad”. Thus, affective, contractual, and moral forces could be less important to this rational, comparative decision process while calculative, behavioral, normative forces would be more salient.

Discussion

Directions for Future Theory Development

The proposed 8 forces framework offers an option for researchers wishing to have a fully-specified content model of turnover instead of a deficient and/or arbitrary set of predictors. The framework also suggests many new research directions. The first is to synthesize or develop measures of all the forces and begin to assess their dimensionality. Then, studies measuring all the forces could test: (1) whether the variance explained in turnover intentions and behavior is greater than for previous models, (2) how the forces interact with each other to explain turnover, (3) whether other variables moderate the relationships between the forces and turnover behavior, (4) which forces are most predictive of turnover for different key subgroups (e.g., high performers), and (5) how forces vary with job performance over time.

Because the forces will change levels over time, it is likely that the measures of the forces taken close (in time) to behavior will be more strongly related to turnover than measures taken longer before behavior (e.g., Hom et al., 1992). However, forces like calculative and moral forces may be more stable over time or more future-oriented. This could enable them to predict turnover over a greater time lag than other forces. Another question for research is under what conditions do forces drop gradually vs. sharply leading to turnover (e.g., Sheridan & Abelson, 1983)? For instance, purposeful renegeing on a promise by the organization may bring about sharp drops in contractual and affective forces of attachment (Robinson & Morrison, 2000), whereas having many minor errors in one’s paycheck may cause a slow, consistent drop in these two forces over a long period. Finally, empirical

studies should investigate whether the forces are bipolar, as proposed. For example, are contractual forces of attachment and contractual forces of withdrawal directions of one construct or two separate constructs?

Despite its considerable contribution and research potential, the proposed framework poses challenges that must be overcome through future research. First, measures of the forces are certain to be significantly and positively correlated in empirical studies because one significant event often influences multiple motives, because employees' have implicit theories about turnover relationships, and because of the coincidence in time of turnover cognitions that are linked to multiple forces. Quantitative measures must be developed to be distinct and minimize this correlation. Second, we do not attempt to model the many potential interactive effects of the forces (e.g., [Trevor, 2001](#)), nor do we model changes in the forces over time. Despite the need for such research, it will be difficult to measure the forces in real time as they change to precipitate final turnover decisions. Capturing these critical changes would probably require unprecedented, multi-faceted methodologies (e.g., diaries of membership-related cognition along with repeated quantitative measurements of the force levels over time) and other qualitative techniques. Further, with the broad scope and objectives of this paper, we obviously could not review all relevant literature or address all measurement issues surrounding each force. Researchers should undertake such elaborations in future studies.

Implications for Methodology

For much of the suggested research on the framework (or practical application) to be conducted, researchers must first create measures of the 8 forces. Clearly some measures exist that capture the forces to some extent. For example, [Meyer et al. \(1993\)](#) three-component commitment measures capture affective, behavioral, and contractual forces to some extent. However, such commitment measures may capture other constructs as well ([Bozeman & Perrewe, 2001](#)) and may correlate very highly with each other ([Meyer et al., 1993](#)). If researchers want to maximize the variance in motives captured, the measurement challenge is to precisely capture the motivational mechanism, emphasizing the distinctiveness of each force while reducing conceptual overlap and empirical correlation among measures. We offer three examples for affective, behavioral, and contractual forces that illustrate how this can be done, and thus, how current measures may be improved upon.

First, to more precisely capture affective forces, respondents could be asked, "when you think about ___ (name of the organization), how do you feel?" Responses could then be recorded with semantic differential scales (e.g., [Jaros, Jermier, Kohler & Sincich, 1993](#)). These approaches would help isolate affective forces from the cognitive-evaluative elements also captured in attitude scales ([Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996](#)).

As another example, in measuring behavioral forces, items should capture explicit costs and less obvious sacrifices that employees perceive to be associated with their leaving (e.g., lost benefit of company-specific training, lost company-specific tenure toward promotion, lost accumulated vacation, lost company services, loss of an easy work commute, or other hassles) rather than global assessments in order to capture the full variance of behavioral forces ([Mitchell et al., 2001](#)). Measures should also capture psychological costs brought about by past behaviors favoring or opposing membership. However, employees may not

readily recognize and report the psychological cost associated with staying or leaving. Thus, these costs may have to be inferred from the reported frequency of explicit, irreversible, volitional, or public past behaviors that favor/oppose membership (Salancik, 1977) like choosing the organization from many alternatives or doing recruiting work for it (e.g., O'Reilly & Caldwell, 1981).

As a final example, for contractual forces, items should focus on obligations to the organization rather than the results of those obligations. Also, to measure the full variance toward the turnover end of the motivational continuum, items should be added to reflect breaches of the psychological contract (e.g., Robinson et al., 1994). Examples might be, "I don't owe this organization anything; this organization owes me because of its broken promises or because of my excellent performance and long service." Also, employee adherence to the norm of reciprocity should also be captured and perhaps used to weight contractual forces in turnover prediction studies.

Conclusion

The framework synthesized in this paper provides an answer to the question, "Why does an employee stay or quit?" Previously, no such answer was available in a single source. We present a new way of looking at turnover through a lens of causal motives rather than a simplistic aggregation of significant predictors into "box and line" models. Hopefully, by providing improved comprehensiveness and significant parsimony in the face of a large, overlapping set of predictors in the literature, this framework should help stimulate future research in the turnover area.

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