STUDYING EMPLOYEE TURNOVER BY SPLITTING UP THE USUAL COMPARISON GROUP

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how a mixed method of turnover research, combining advantages of traditional methods while reducing the disadvantages, may improve the fitness-for-use of turnover research for organizations. In a survey study, an exit group of former employees who had left an organization voluntarily was compared with a group of employees who were still working in the organization. Then, the comparison group was split into two subgroups. The true-comparison group was composed of employees who had a low intention of quitting. The potential-turnover group was formed by employees with a high intention of leaving the organization. Results show that, in general, no differences exist between the exit group and the potential-turnover group in mean scores on variables that (according to theory) determine turnover. But the exit group and the true-comparison group differ sharply. Implications for turnover research are discussed.

Much of the literature suggests that employee turnover is related to unmet expectations, pre-existing intentions, and notions relating to perceived justice. Our study examines factors associated with employee turnover. However, the main purpose of the study was to demonstrate the advantages of a specific research

methodology: studying turnover by comparing answers of former employees on a questionnaire with the answers of special subgroups of the present employees.

We all know that employee turnover may be costly for organizations. Employees who have left the organization must be replaced. This implies a new process of recruitment, selection, training, and development. In principle, organizations could profit from turnover research. In practice, however, turnover research is plagued by problems that are caused by conventional research methods. These problems may hamper efforts to reduce dysfunctional turnover in organizations. The present study shows how these problems may be dealt with.

This study starts with a description of a brief history of turnover research. Then, the common methods of doing research are described and evaluated. This leads to the conclusion that it is possible to use a mixed method of turnover research, combining the advantages of the traditional methods, while the disadvantages are reduced. Finally, results are presented of a study that made use of the proposed mixed method. Results of this study are promising and offer a relatively easy way for organizations to improve the quality of their research into the reasons why people quit.

This article demonstrates how the method of comparing questionnaire results from employees who have left voluntarily with questionnaire results from subgroups of current employees enables researchers and/or managers to draw reliable, valid conclusions about the reasons for employee turnover and to improve turnover predictions. The mixed method is "quick and clean" and far less-expensive and also less time-consuming than traditional longitudinal scientific methods. At the same time, the mixed method does not suffer from the problems of interpretation that are characteristic of the conventional exit research used by human resources managers.

TURNOVER RESEARCH: A BRIEF HISTORY

The origins of turnover research can be traced back to the 1950s, when March and Simon published their motivation model of turnover. According to that model, voluntary turnover in organizations resulted from perceived desirability of movement and the perceived ease of movement [1]. Later, several authors proposed other key constructs, usually including the theoretical notions of March and Simon's model, sometimes in a slightly modified version.

During the 1970s, at least three advances in turnover theory could be discerned in the literature. In 1973, the construct of "unmet expectations" was introduced to explain turnover [2]. Expectations that are unmet lead to dissatisfaction, and dissatisfaction is seen as the direct cause of turnover. A second approach was introduced in 1975, based on the theory of reasoned action, positing that actions (in this case, turnover) can be predicted by intentions with respect to the act, which can be predicted by attitudes toward the act and by subjective norms—both personal and social normative beliefs may play a role [3].

The explanatory power of the theory of reasoned action in turn, was strengthened significantly by adding the construct of perceived behavioral control, and nowadays researchers generally prefer to use this broader model, which came to be known as the theory of planned behavior (TPB) [4-5]. In the 1970s, the idea that the linkage between dissatisfaction and turnover plays a central role, was developed further, resulting in a model in which a series of intermediate linkages between dissatisfaction and turnover was posited to explain the underlying processes related to employee turnover [6-7].

In the two decades that followed, several further advances were introduced. Employee turnover was explained by models introducing the constructs of "cusp catastrophe" and shock [8-10], and taxonomic models of withdrawal behavior, for example, the adaptive-response model with the well-known typology of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect [9, 11]. In the 1980s the importance of commitment as a possible determinant of turnover intentions and turnover behavior became clear too [12-15]. Moreover, attention was paid to the complex relationship between job performance and turnover, and in the 1990s this resulted in the development of an integrative multiroute model, which argues that performance may lead to turnover through three different routes [16].

Finally, an important advance in the 1990s was the growing attention to organizational injustice as a cause of employee turnover. Both distributive and procedural injustice in organizations may lead to turnover intentions, withdrawal, and turnover behaviors of employees. For an early study, see [17]; for a recent meta-analysis of the effects of unfairness on employees, see [18].

Theories of distributive justice focus on the fairness of the outcomes that people receive. Equity theory is perhaps the best-known distributive justice theory. According to equity theory, people perceive outcomes as fair when the ratio of their own outcomes and inputs equals the ratio of outcomes and inputs of comparison others. Perceived unfairness may lead to efforts to reduce the unfairness. Several methods are available, e.g., actual or cognitive changes of inputs and outcomes, or "leaving the field" (comparable to voluntary turnover). For a discussion of equity theory, see [19].

Satisfaction of people in situations where outcomes are allocated is heavily influenced by the *procedures* used in such situations. This is the domain of procedural-justice theories. Procedures used to arrive at a decision have profound effects on fairness judgments. In the last fifteen years, the *relational* or *group value* model of procedural justice, proposed by Tyler and Lind, has become very popular [20]. This model focuses on relationship issues and especially on perceptions of the relationships between authorities and group members who are subject to their decisions. Three factors are seen as important for procedural-fairness judgments: trust, standing, and neutrality. Fair procedures lead to perceptions of legitimacy of authorities (and organizations) and to voluntary compliance of people. Unfair procedures may lead to dissatisfaction, low commitment, and employee turnover.

The way you treat persons to whom outcomes are to be allocated is categorized by researchers such as Tyler, Lind (and others) as a form of procedural justice. Some researchers distinguish explicitly between procedural (in)justice and *interactional* (in)justice [21]. Interactional justice explicitly deals with employees' perceptions of treatment by (the managers of) the organization as a motivator for actions, including resignation. Moreover, such actions as wrongful dismissal lawsuits, retaliation, vengeance, theft, and sabotage may be partially explained by perceived interactional injustice [22].

The present review of turnover research was not meant to be exhaustive. More complete reviews can be found in the literature [see, e.g., 18, 23-24].

TURNOVER RESEARCH: METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

The three best-known methods of turnover research are cohort analysis, traditional longitudinal research, and exit research. Cohort analysis and traditional longitudinal research are *predictive* methods, while exit research is *retrospective.*

Exit Research

In exit research, former employees of an organization who had left voluntarily are asked, some time after they left, their reasons for leaving. This procedure encounters problems [2, 25]. As exit research is retrospective, the answers may be influenced by the passing of time (hindsight bias), as well as by comparisons of the former work situation with the *new* work situation. Usually, the employees who had left are not compared with the group of employees who are still working in that organization. This makes the interpretation of the results rather debatable. For instance, a result indicating that former employees thought their salary had been much too low loses credibility as a reason for resignation if it turns out that the current employees hold the same opinion.

Predictive Research Methods

These methodological weaknesses may, in principle, be solved by two forms of *predictive* research: cohort analysis and traditional longitudinal turnover research. These are both forms of longitudinal research. With *cohort analysis*, groups of employees who have been employed in a certain period are followed for a longer period of time. Periodically, ex-employees and "stayers" from this cohort are compared, for instance, on their opinions about work content and salary. In traditional longitudinal turnover research, at a certain moment a questionnaire is presented or an interview is held with a cross-section of the employees in an organization. Later, for instance after one year, the questionnaire is examined to determine how "stayers" differ from "leavers" i.e., those who have voluntarily left the organization. Managers of most organizations are of the opinion

that such predictive research is far too time-consuming, and restrict themselves to exit research.

Our Approach: A Mixed Method

In this article, a study is reported on the causes of personnel turnover in a profit organization. We describe the pros and cons of a procedure in which exit research is combined with research among employees in an organization. The method employed is a good alternative for situations in which a predictive research design is not possible or feasible.

In our study we combined exit research among former employees with cross-sectional research among employees still working in the organization (the comparison group). This enables a fast data procurement and data processing (an advantage over traditional predictive research), where only the problem of possible hindsight bias may exist among ex-employees. The remaining problems of exit research are overcome because of the comparison group. This study even gains explanatory power by splitting the comparison group into two subgroups that differ in the mean strength of their turnover intention, namely, employees without clear exit plans and those with concrete exit plans. This procedure is based on conclusions from traditional turnover research that the intention to quit work (*turnover intention*) is the best predictor of the actual voluntary turnover in an organization [23; 25-26]. We assume that the employees in the comparison group vary in their turnover intention, and that employees with a high turnover intention (the potential ex-employees) differ from employees with a low turnover intention (the true stayers) on the determinants of personnel turnover. We therefore create two subgroups within the comparison group, for employees with a high and a low resignation intention, respectively. Subsequently, these subgroups are compared with the exit group on a number of possibly explanatory variables for turnover.

Determinants of Turnover

Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, and Meglino developed a model in which the most important variables that influence the individual resign decision are processed [7]. This complex model was later simplified by Michaels and Spector [27]. In our investigation, we used the variables from that simplified model, as well as a number of variables known from the literature that may play a role in the decision to leave a certain organization on a voluntary basis. However, the emphasis is on the different *methods* to investigate turnover, and not on the identification of the most important reasons to resign (these appear to differ considerably among organizations).

The following variables are involved in the study: a) general work satisfaction; b) satisfaction with the following work aspects: job content; direct management; colleagues; participation in decision making; career possibilities; salary;

work environment; c) organizational commitment; d) materialized expectations; e) employment opportunities; and f) resignation intention. The predictive value of these variables has been demonstrated [27, 28].

Hypotheses

We wanted to test two hypotheses:

1. Employees from the entire comparison group differ significantly from the ex-employees in the exit group on the measured determinants of turnover.
2. The differences between ex-employees and a subgroup from the comparison group, consisting of employees with a low exit intention, are larger than the differences between ex-employees and employees from the comparison group who have a high exit intention.

METHOD

General Procedure

The investigation was done in a profit organization, a car company with approximately 500 employees. Questionnaires were forwarded to the home addresses of the respondents: ex-employees and employees from a comparison group of those still working in the organization. The self-addressed envelopes were to be sent to Leiden University.

Ex-Employees

All employees who had relatively recently left the organization on a voluntary basis received a questionnaire. The dates of resignation of these respondents were between one month and thirty-three months before the questionnaire was sent. (The term of thirty-three months was chosen with regard to administration and reporting per calendar year in this organization.) Of 110 ex-employees, sixty-eight (62%) returned their questionnaires. Afterward two respondents were deleted from the research group because it appeared from their reasons for resignation that they had not resigned voluntarily. Thus, the eventual response was 60%.

Of the sixty-six respondents in the exit group, 73% were younger than thirty-five, 22% were between thirty-five and forty-five, and 5% were older than forty-five. The number of service years was: 64% have been with the organization less than four years, 25% five to ten years, and 11% more than ten years.

For the purpose of the analysis in which the exit group is compared with the comparison group of present employees, only those respondents were used who were younger than thirty-five and who had been with the organization for less than four years ($N = 37$). We did this because the organization wanted to analyze

the employee group with a relatively high turnover. In all other age- and service-year categories (which are obviously connected), turnover was very low. This pattern of differences in turnover rates among age groups agrees with the literature on turnover. One of the most robust findings of turnover research is the negative relationship between age and turnover. In general, voluntary turnover rates are relatively high among young workers, but (very) low among older workers [23].

Comparison Group

The study, therefore, consisted of: 1) an "exit group" of thirty-seven former employees who were younger than 35 years, with less than four years of service; and 2) a present employee group comparable in service, age, gender, function, and department. The fifty-eight questionnaires mailed to this comparison group, produced thirty-nine usable responses (67%).

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire included questions on background information such as age, service years, and (for ex-employees) questions on reasons for leaving. Moreover, a large range of items was included in the questionnaire to measure relevant independent variables (turnover predictors). The ex-employees were asked about their former perceptions, attitudes, commitment, et cetera.[1]

General Job Satisfaction

The items in the questionnaire regarding general job satisfaction were derived from the Brayfield-Rothe-scale for job satisfaction [29]. In view of the bulk of the initial questionnaire, four of the eighteen items were selected (on the basis of the item-total correlations). A sample item reads as follows:

"Most days I am enthusiastic about my work" (five-point scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, . . . , 5 = strongly agree).

The reliability of the scale combining the four items in both research groups can be seen in Table 1. A major advantage of Brayfield and Rothe's items is that they are very general and content-free. Therefore, the items are "good" for measuring a general affective evaluation of the job. However, general and content-free items do not allow the researcher to determine with which aspects of the job the employee is satisfied and dissatisfied. Such specific aspects may be crucial in decisions to leave the organization. Hence, it was also necessary to include items in the questionnaire to measure aspect satisfaction, i.e., satisfaction with specific job features.

[1] The questionnaire (in Dutch) may be obtained from the first author.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha Reliabilities of
Scales in Exit Group and Comparison Group

	Exit group	Comparison group
Job satisfaction	.87	.81
Organization commitment	.80	.77
Materialized expectations	.72	.39

Aspect Satisfaction

Aspect satisfaction was measured by asking how satisfied the respondent was with regard to, respectively, the job content, direct management, colleagues, possibilities of participation, career opportunities, salary, and work environment. For each separate aspect, a seven-point scale was used, where 1 = very dissatisfied and 7 = very satisfied. A sample item is:

Considering your colleagues, how satisfied are you with your colleagues?

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment was measured with five items. Four items were taken from the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire of Mowday et al. [30], translated into Dutch by van Breukelen [31]. The fifth statement was an operationalization and reads: "I have (had) a lot of interest in information (for instance in newspapers and on TV) about the company and product X" (five-point scale, from 1 = strongly disagree, . . . , 5 = strongly agree). The reliability of the organizational commitment scales in both research groups is described in Table 1.

Materialized Expectations

Three items in the questionnaire examined whether the expectations workers had at the beginning of their work with the company had materialized. These items related to general expectations, as well as expectations regarding the employee's own function and the entire organization. A sample item is: "When I started working at _____ (name company), the company turned out to be completely different from what I expected" (five-point answer scale, from 1 = completely disagree, . . . , 5 = completely agree). The statements together appear to form a reliable scale (after recoding of the sample item) (see Table 1). A score of 1 on the combined scale indicates that the expectations had not materialized; a score of 5 indicates that expectations had been met completely. The reliability of the materialized expectations scale in both research groups is described in Table 1.

Chances on the Labor Market

With the aid of a single item, we examined how a worker (for the exit group: at that time), in view of his/her age, education, and occupation, and in light of the economic situation, estimated his/her chances of finding an attractive job elsewhere. The responses could range from 1: very small chance, to 5: very big chance.

Intention to resign

The intention to resign was—obviously—only measured among the employees in the comparison group, with the help of two questions [32].

- If it were your own decision, would you still be working at this company next year? (Response possibilities from 1: absolutely not, to 5: absolutely);
- Do you ever think about looking for another job? (Response possibilities from 1: never, to 5: almost all the time).

After the answers to the first question were recoded, the two questions were combined into one scale, with an internal consistency of .77. The division of the comparison group into respondents with a high and low resign intention is based on the mean score on the aforementioned questions. Respondents with a mean score smaller than or equal to three, were assigned to the group with a low resign intention ($N = 25$); respondents with a mean score higher than three are assigned to the group with a high resign intention ($N = 14$).

Reliability

The reliability of the various scales is acceptable for both groups. An exception is the very low reliability of the scale "materialized expectations" in the comparison group. It is possible that the respondents in this group, all of whom were still working in the organization, had not formed a consistent picture on the extent of the realization of their expectations.

RESULTS

The scores on the turnover-predictor variables of the ex-employees were compared with the scores on the same variables of, respectively, all employees in the comparison group, the employees in the comparison group with a low resign intention (the "true" comparison group), and the employees with a strong, high resign intention. The mean scores are described in Table 2. The results of t-tests on differences between these means are also described in this table.

The group means of the exit group (Table 2, column 1) did not differ significantly seven out of eleven times from the means of the group of employees still working in the organization (column 2). The exit group scores were statistically

Table 2. Mean Scores in Exit Group, Entire (Usual) Comparison Group,
and Subgroups with Low/High Resign Intention

Predictor variable	Ex-employees (N = 37)	Usual comp. group: All employees in comp. group (N = 39)	True comp. group: Employees with low resign intention (N = 25)	Potential turnover group: Employees with high resign intention (N = 14)
General job satisfaction	3.2	3.6*	3.9***	3.0
Aspect satisfaction with:				
– job content	3.7	4.5*	5.0***	3.6
– direct management	3.9	4.7*	5.3**	3.6
– participation	3.4	4.0	4.5**	2.9
– colleagues	5.2	5.5	5.7	5.1
– salary	4.0	3.9	4.0	3.7
– career opportunities	2.8	3.6*	4.1**	2.6
– work environment	5.4	5.0	5.3	4.6*
Organizational commitment	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.1
Materialized expectations	2.9	3.0	3.3*	2.6
Chances on labor market	4.3	4.1	4.1	4.1

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

significantly lower on the remaining four variables ($p < .05$): general job satisfaction; satisfaction with job content; direct management; and career possibilities. The data suggest that those who leave the organization differ from those who stay, taken as a whole, in their feelings about job content, direct management, and career opportunities. Apparently, the lower satisfaction with these job aspects also results in a lower score on general job satisfaction. To explore this topic more fully, we divided the present employee group into two classes: those with low intention to resign ($N = 25$) and those who, while staying, indicated a stronger desire to leave ($N = 14$). Here we found almost no differences between those who have left and those who have the higher intention to resign, but more pronounced differences between the former employees and present employees who have a low intention to resign. The differences between ex-employees and present employees with a low resign intention are larger. They are also more often and more strongly significant than was the case when comparisons were made between the ex-employees and the usual comparison group of all present employees: significant differences are established for scores on general job satisfaction, for the aspect satisfaction with, respectively, job content, direct management, participation, and career opportunities, as well as for the variable

"materialized expectations." The scores of the present employees with low resign intention are in almost all cases (far) more positive than the scores of the ex-employees (see Table 2, column 3).

The scores of the present employees with a strong, high resign intention presented us with a different picture: these scores are more or less equal to the scores of the ex-employees, and in one case—aspect satisfaction with work environment—even significantly lower (see Table 2, right-hand column). It is remarkable that, although the remaining differences are not significant, employees with a strong intention to resign generally score a little lower than ex-employees.

Discriminant Analyses

On the basis of the results described in Table 2, we examined whether the predictability of turnover would increase when respondents with a strong resign intention would be removed from the comparison group. For that purpose two discriminant analyses were carried out, in which we used the eleven potential turnover determinants as independent variables.

First, a discriminant analysis was carried out, with the *traditional* distinction between ex-employees and the entire comparison group as a criterion. The proportion of explained variance was .20. This result is comparable to those found by Arnold and Feldman [28] and Michaels and Spector [27], who used a comparable set of variables in their investigations and who also found that about 20% of all turnover behavior could be explained by these similar predictor variables.

Subsequently, a discriminant analysis was carried out with the distinction between ex-employees and employees with a low resign intention as a criterion. By removing employees with a high resign intention from the comparison group, the proportion of explained variance increased to .35. Now, the same variables explained 75% more of the variance between stayers and ex-employees (see Table 3). Or, to put it in other words, maximizing the discrimination of score profiles among those who will stay and those who have left can be increased by a factor of nearly two by splitting up the conventional comparison group of stayers (35% of differences between scores on predictor variables explained versus 20% when using the conventional comparison group). This implies that placement of new individuals in the category of "leaver" or "stayer" can become far more accurate.

The discriminant function is the linear combination of variables for optimally differentiating among the two groups of those who have left and those who stay. To get more insight into the relative contributions of the predictor variables to the discriminant function, it is necessary to take a closer look at the standardized discriminant weights. The standardized weights of the several satisfaction variables used in the discriminant analysis of the exit group and the group of those who stay and who have a low resign intention are (in parentheses):

Table 3. Discriminant Analyses

	Group means on discriminant function (Group centroids)	
	I*)	II**)
1: Exit group	−.52	−.62
2: Comp. group	.45	.84
Canonical correlation	.44	.59
Canonical correlation (squared)	.20	.35
Eigenvalue	.24	.54
p-Value of discriminant function	.02	.01

*) I = results of discriminant analysis with exit group and usual (entire) comparison group as criterion.

**) II = results of discriminant analysis with exit group and subgroup of employees with low resign intention as criterion.

general job satisfaction (.21), aspect satisfaction with job content (.28), satisfaction with direct management (.36), satisfaction with participation (.17), satisfaction with colleagues (.23), satisfaction with salary (−.41), satisfaction with career opportunities (.61), satisfaction with work environment (−.37). The (rather low) standardized weights of the other three variables are, respectively, −.17 for organizational commitment, .10 for materialized expectations, and −.10 for the perceived chances on the labor market. Apparently, in general, the satisfaction variables should be given more weight to maximize the differences between those who have left the organization and those who are stayers with a low resign intention.

DISCUSSION

Ex-employees scored significantly lower than present employees on four of eleven turnover predictor variables in the entire (total) comparison group; no significant differences turned up on the remaining predictor variables. Our first hypothesis has thus (partly for four variables) been corroborated. Subsequently, the entire comparison group was split up into two subgroups with a low- and high-resign intention, respectively. Our second hypothesis received some support: Ex-employees and employees with a low resign intention differed significantly from one another on more variables (6 instead of 4), and the levels of significance were considerably stronger.

Exploratory testing shows that hardly any significant differences existed between ex-employees and present employees with a high resign intention (with one exception, namely, the variable "satisfaction with work environment").

Finally, from multivariate discriminant analysis it appears that the proportion of explained variance increased strongly (from .20 to .35) when respondents with high resign intention were removed from the comparison group, and when ex-employees were compared only with the "true stayers," the subgroup of employees with low resign intention.

It should be noted that the ex-employees, the employees with high resign intention and the employees with low resign intention hardly differed in the perceived chances to find an attractive job elsewhere. Generally, chances were seen as rather high. So, in the present study, perceived probability of success in changing organizations did not play a role in the prediction of turnover behavior. This does not imply that the perceived chance to find a nice job can't be an important variable. It is possible that negative changes in the economic situation may enhance the weight of this factor.

It is true that the sample sizes of the comparison groups in the present study are rather small. In general, small sample sizes make it difficult to find statistically significant results. However, in spite of the small sample sizes, differences between the leavers and the stayers with low intention to resign were statistically highly significant.

Our investigation presents a useful alternative for the usual practical research on turnover in organizations. In order to deal with methodological objections, another comparison group of present employees was formed next to a (usual) exit group. This presented the researchers with the opportunity to compare the mean scores of ex-employees and stayers. Furthermore, it is possible to determine, with the help of multivariate analysis, what the contribution is of the various determinants to "explain" turnover. The problem of hindsight bias has not yet been resolved. The fundamental longitudinal design is a little stronger at this point. But even the fundamental longitudinal research design does not offer the perfect solution, since in the period of time between data collection and the actual resignation of employees the circumstances and attitudes could have changed. The method of doing exit research, as we suggested, is a good alternative for those situations in which a long-term, longitudinal predictive research design is not possible. The results presented here suggest that researchers—in a fundamental as well as in a practical research situation—always should determine whether the data point to differences *within* the comparison group between respondents with a high and low resign intention. In the event that the mean scores of these two subgroups on turnover determinants do indeed differ, it would be advisable to carry out further analyses with a comparison group that has been split into two subgroups. This might, in the long run, lead to more adequate theories on, and strategies against, voluntary turnover of personnel.

Advice to Organizations

The present study is of practical interest to organizations. Many human resources managers try to get more insight into the reasons for turnover by interviewing employees who have announced that they will resign, and/or by interviewing those who have left recently. This is the traditional method of doing exit research. This kind of research allows managers to get quick results by conducting just a few interviews. However, there's a problem: You never can be sure that the results are valid. As was mentioned in the section on methodological problems, valid interpretations can be made only when attitudes and perceptions of leavers can be compared with the attitudes and perceptions of those who stay. Moreover, in face-to-face interviews people often do not disclose all their beliefs, opinions, and reasons for their behaviors. "Impression management" and a felt need to be polite sometimes may restrict their openness. In situations where anonymity is more or less taken for granted—as is usually the case in survey research—more openness may be expected. So, the validity of the method of comparison groups is higher than the validity of the traditional exit interview.

Of course, the cohort analysis and the traditional longitudinal turnover research methods also are characterized by high validity. Why, then, should organizations prefer the mixed method that we used in the present study? Organizations that want to design and implement a policy to reduce turnover often simply don't want to wait a long time until they have the research results they need. Cohort analyses and traditional longitudinal turnover research take at least one year—and often even much more time—before analysis of the data can get started. The "mixed method" offers about the same high quality of results, but it can be executed within a few weeks. Often, exit research by HR managers interviewing employees who want to leave voluntarily takes even more time. The costs of the mixed method are rather low, partly because of the short time it takes to do the research. The job can be done efficiently by a junior researcher or junior consultant with some basic knowledge of standard statistical packages.

The finding of the present study that exiting employees are very similar to employees with high resign intentions has interesting implications. First, splitting the comparison group of employees into subgroups with low-, and high-resign intentions, respectively, offers insight into the *size* of the potential turnover group: It will be clear how many employees think about leaving the organization. Secondly, comparisons between the exit group and the "true comparison group" of employees with low resign intentions may indicate the "weights" of the variables that, according to former and present employees, are relevant when people decide whether they want to leave or stay. These weights indicate where efforts should be made to enhance the attractiveness of the organization.

Employment Rights

Both the sources and the subject matter of employment rights are highly varied. The mixed method of turnover research can be useful in the domain of employment rights concerning the quality or working life (QWL). In the Netherlands—and in many other countries—employers have an obligation to comply with legally prescribed standards of QWL. The Dutch Work Environment Act, e.g., specifies several criteria for QWL. In almost all modern societies it is generally accepted that employees have the right to work in organizations and workplaces where the QWL attains acceptable levels. The research method proposed in our study can be very helpful in designing and improving the QWL policies of organizations.

The "aspect satisfaction" items can be used as a "quick scan" of employees' perceptions of the quality of relevant aspects of the work and the workplace. It is perfectly possible to add more specific questions and items to the questionnaire to assess more details of the aspects. Actually, we have done so in some of our organizational change projects.

Of course, the questionnaire items on resignation intentions offer organizations insight into the dangers of high future turnover. The present study demonstrated convincingly that perceptions and attitudes of employees with high resignation intentions hardly differ from the perceptions and attitudes of those who have left already. Mean scores on the aspect satisfaction items may indicate where efforts to improve QWL are most urgently needed. Better QWL generally leads to higher satisfaction and stronger commitment to the organization among employees, and it also results in lower turnover intentions and lower voluntary turnover. Apparently, efforts to reduce voluntary turnover can be combined easily with efforts to comply with legislation on the quality of working life.

ENDNOTES

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