An Examination of Tenure in Negative Organizational Environments

Matthew Valle, Ken Harris and Martha C Andrews

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine how tenure moderates the relationships between the independent variables politics perceptions and perceived organizational support, and the dependent variable individual intentions to turnover. Regression analyses on data from 338 full-time employees at a water management district revealed that turnover intentions were positively related to perceptions of politics, and were negatively related to perceived organizational support. Additionally, hierarchical moderated regression analysis revealed that in organizational environments perceived as being very political and/or lacking effective support (e.g., negative environments), shorter tenure in the organization was associated with increased levels of turnover intentions. Managerial implications for addressing negative organizational environments are discussed.

Keywords: Organizational Politics, Organizational Support, Negative Organizational Environment

As 2004 progresses, it appears as though the global bear market is finally loosening its chokehold on business expansion and growth. If the economic trends continue, managers will soon initiate plans to grow their employee rolls, and soon, workers will initiate plans to explore the expanding job market. Of major concern to managers today has to be whether or not they will be able to keep their good people. Absent the restraining forces, which kept people in jobs through the economic downturn, the market for talent is poised to heat up considerably. As we consider all that has changed and will change in organizations over time, organizations must not lose sight of the basic exchange inherent in the employment relationship between worker and company – “treat me well and I will stay.” This study seeks to explore the relationship between organizational environments and turnover. The central question concerns the degree to which organizational tenure interacts with two measures of organization environment to predict intentions to leave the organization.

The Nature of Organizational Work Environments – Organizational Politics and Organizational Support

Each of us works to obtain certain outcomes, and the idea of work as an exchange relationship is a fixture in economics. As such, our work is a personal investment, and the exchange is a personal choice. The choice to continue the exchange (e.g., work for pay) is determined, in part, by one’s assessment of the social environment of the workplace (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey & Toth, 1997). The nature of organizational environments has occupied researchers for some time, and the characterization of work environments as positive or negative is reflected in the terminology of
A growing field of research on organizational environments is in the area of organizational politics. The notion of work environments as political was advanced by Ferris, Russ and Fandt (1989). They posited that organizational politics is perceived as a negative force contributing to negative affective and behavioral outcomes, and empirical research has confirmed many of the relationships proposed in their original model (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey & Toth, 1997; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris et al., 1996; Parker, Dipboye & Jackson, 1995; Valle & Perrewe, 2000; Zhou & Ferris, 1995). The experience of organizational politics is a subjective, personal experience (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Gandz & Murray, 1980), and the frequent negative association between politics and outcomes is the result of what Cropanzano et al. (1997) refer to as a break in the social contract between employer and employee. Quite simply, it is difficult for organizational participants to react positively when they perceive that promotions, pay raises and organizational rewards (among other things) are based upon political considerations, rather than formal, objective considerations, such as merit or output (Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999; Witt, Andrews & Kacmar, 2000).

In our continuing investigations (see Kacmar & Baron, 1999) of work environments (i.e., organizational politics), we are beginning to identify and confront a few enduring and sobering realities: organizational political activities are pervasive, demonstrably self-serving, and often run counter to the goals of the organization (Drory & Romm, 1990; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris, Russ and Fandt, 1989; Mintzberg, 1985). It is easy to understand, then, why researchers have recently focused on the identification of moderating factors, which might ameliorate the negative effects of politics perceptions on outcomes (Ferris, Frink, Gilmore & Kacmar, 1994; Valle & Witt, 2001; Witt, 1995; Witt, 1998; Witt, Andrews & Kacmar, 2000).

Organizational support, on the other hand, has been proposed as a global construct intended to measure perceptions of support provided by the organization, and these perceptions have been found to be positively related to positive work outcomes (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). A supportive organization cares about its employees and seeks ways to enhance the quality of work life. Employees who perceive high levels of organizational support have been found to increase work effort, citizenship behaviors, and tenure (Cropanzano et al., 1997). Cropanzano et al. (1997) found that organizational politics perceptions and perceptions of organizational support were separate and distinct constructs, and could predict outcomes independent of each other.

Given this discussion, we offer the following hypotheses concerning the relationship between perceptions of politics/perceived organizational support and intentions to turnover:

**H1:** Perceptions of organizational politics will be positively related to turnover intentions.

**H2:** Perceptions of organization support will be negatively related to turnover intentions.

**How Long Will They Put Up With It?**

The central question offered by this research is whether or not tenure within the organization interacts with perceptions of organizational environments to predict differential outcomes (in this case, intent to turnover). The following hypothesis is offered:

**H3:** Organizational tenure will moderate the relationship between organizational politics/perceptions of organizational support and intent to turnover such that intent to turnover will increase for low tenure individuals in highly political environments and in low support environments.

**Method**

**Sample**

The sample consisted of 338 employees (response rate of 49%) from different levels and departments of a water management district in the southeastern United States. The respondents were primarily
male (57%) and Caucasian (83%). The ages of the respondents ranged from 22 to 76 with a mean age of 41 years. Due to concerns about respondent anonymity, tenure was measured categorically with responses being grouped in three-year blocks (i.e., 0-2 years, 3-5 years, 6-8 years, etc.). Respondents indicated that their organizational tenures ranged from 0 years to more than 18 years, with the largest majority of subjects reporting their tenure being between 6-8 years.

Procedure
The survey was conducted at the request of the company’s top management who were interested in determining employees’ feelings about the organization. Employees were notified of the opportunity to participate in the study via a company wide memo distributed a week prior to the distribution of the survey. For data collection, one of the researchers went on site and distributed the surveys. Surveys were administered during regular working hours in groups of up to 50 over a period of three days.

Measures
Perceptions of politics: Perceptions of organizational politics were measured with fifteen items from the revised Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS) (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). A sample item from this scale was “People in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down.” The coefficient alpha reliability for this scale was .87.

Perceived Organizational Support: Perceived organizational support was measured with the 15-item measure from Eisenberger et al. (1986). A sample item from this scale was “This organization disregards my best interests when it makes decisions that affect me” (reverse scored). The alpha reliability for this scale was .93.

Organizational Tenure: Due to concerns about respondent anonymity, tenure was measured categorically with responses being grouped in three-year blocks (i.e., 0-2 years, 3-5 years, 6-8 years, 9-11 years, 12-14 years, 15-17 years, and 18 years and more). The largest majority of subjects reported their tenure being between 6-8 years.

Intent to turnover: Intent to turnover was measured with three items from Seashore, Lawler, Mirvis, and Cammann (1982). A sample item from this scale was “I will probably look for a new job in the near future.” The coefficient alpha reliability for this scale was .84.

Control variables: In this study we controlled for age, gender, and race. We included age, gender, and race as biographical control variables in this study because previous research has shown these variables to be related to turnover intentions (Griffeth et al., 2000; Hom & Griffeth, 1995). Age was measured in number of years. Gender was measured and coded with men as 1 and women as 2. Race was measured and coded with Asians as 1, African-Americans as 2, Hispanics as 3, Caucasians as 4, and “others” as 5.

Analyses
We conducted two separate hierarchical moderated regression analyses to assess the form and magnitude of the relationships between the two independent variables, perceptions of politics and perceived organizational support, and the dependent variable of turnover intentions. In the first step, we entered the control variables of age, gender, and race. In the second step, we entered the main effects for perceptions of politics and perceived organizational support. In this test we were able to test for the main effects of the two variables on turnover intentions. In the third step, we entered each employee’s organizational tenure. Finally, in the fourth step, we entered the interaction terms between perceptions of politics and organizational tenure and perceived organizational support and organizational tenure. To graphically illustrate any of the moderating effects that were significant, we utilized the procedure similar to the one recommended by Stone and Hollenbeck (1989), plotting two slopes: one at one standard deviation below the mean and one line at one standard deviation above the mean.
Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Intent to Turnover</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Perceptions of Politics</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.707</td>
<td>.450</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. POS</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.810</td>
<td>-.625</td>
<td>-.724</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Organizational Tenure</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>-.181</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Age</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>8.94</td>
<td>-.194</td>
<td>-.019</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>.283</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Gender</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>.493</td>
<td>-.140</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>-.082</td>
<td>-.079</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Race</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>.675</td>
<td>-1.06</td>
<td>-.029</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 338 based on pairwise deletion

[r > .090, p < .05; r > .126, p < .01]

Table 2: Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analyses Predicting Turnover Intentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>POPSXTenure</th>
<th>POSXTenure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Adj. R²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.018**</td>
<td>.010**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.378**</td>
<td>.366**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>-.117*</td>
<td>.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POPS*Tenure: F(3,334)=8.72**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POPS/POS</td>
<td>1.113**</td>
<td>.263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POPS*Tenure: F(4,333)=31.13**</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Tenure</td>
<td>.253*****</td>
<td>.299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POPS*Tenure: F(5,332)=29.8**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>POPS<em>Tenure/POS</em>Tenure</td>
<td>-.130*</td>
<td>.310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POPS*Tenure: F(6,331)=26.3**</td>
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*p < .05; **p < .01

Unstandardized Betas are provided from the final step

N=338
Results

The reliabilities for all of the scales were above the .70 acceptable level (Nunnally, 1978). Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations are provided in Table 1. Before we proceeded with further analyses, we wanted to note the high negative correlation between perceptions of politics and perceived organizational support ($r = -.724$).

Although this negative correlation is large, this is in line with previous studies that have investigated these two constructs in the same study. More specifically, Cropanzano et al., (1997) found a negative correlation of $r = -.80$ and Randall et al., (1999) found a negative correlation of $r = -.77$.

Regression Analyses

Table 2 provides the results from our regression analyses. Figures 1 and 2 display a graphical depiction of the interaction of both measures of organizational environment with organizational tenure.

Discussion

The results show significant interaction effects, in
support of hypothesis 3. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were also supported via the bivariate correlations and regression analyses. In this study, respondents who had low tenure in the organization were more likely to register their intentions to leave the organization given high perceptions of politics and/or low perceptions of organizational support. It appears that negative organizational environments (e.g., highly political environments, or environments with low organizational support) cause low tenure individuals to initiate a search process for employment elsewhere. In effect, the negative nature of these environments suggests that the inducements gained are not commensurate with the personal investment made. In short, the exchange is deemed inequitable, and the individual may seek to cut his/her losses and move on.

For high tenure individuals, researchers have suggested that familiarization with negative organizational environments is associated with an increased ability to operate within those environments (see, for instance, Valle and Perrewe’, 2000). These individuals may perceive that, regardless of the nature of the organizational environment, too much has been invested in the exchange relationship to leave the organization. The inducements may still compensate for the negative affect generated by the environment.

If a hiring boom does materialize in the coming months, organizational leaders should be on notice that low tenure individuals are more likely to opt out of a negative situation than high tenure individuals. That much we have, perhaps, always known. The additional information concerns the increased likelihood of turnover if those individuals perceive their environment to be negative, either through too much politics or too little organizational support. Perhaps no time is too late in which to address those elements of the organization’s environment, which can be perceived to be negative. In any case, some people will only put up with negative environments for so long, and those who stay will find voice or neglect to be their only remaining options to address a bad situation. All things considered, the exchange will prove to be less beneficial, for all parties, over time.

References


