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Why people stay: Using job embeddedness to predict voluntary turnover

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WHY PEOPLE STAY:
USING JOB EMBEDDEDNESS TO PREDICT
VOLUNTARY TURNOVER

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A new construct, entitled “job embeddedness,” is introduced. It includes individuals’ (1) links to other people, teams, and groups, (2) perceptions of their fit with job, organization, and community, and (3) what they say they would have to sacrifice if they left their jobs. We developed a measure of job embeddedness with two samples. The results show that job embeddedness predicts the key outcomes of both intent to leave and “voluntary turnover” and explains significant incremental variance over and above job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job alternatives, and job search.

The personal and organizational costs of leaving a job are often very high. It is not surprising, then, that employee retention has the attention of top-level managers in today’s organizations. The questions that challenge social scientists and practitioners alike are “Why do people leave?” and “Why do they stay?” Over the years, researchers have developed partial answers to these questions. More specifically, given alternatives, people stay if they are satisfied with their jobs and committed to their organizations and leave if they aren’t. However, the research in scientific journals reports that work attitudes play only a relatively small role overall in employee retention and leaving (Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). Other factors besides job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job alternatives are important for understanding turnover (Maertz & Campion, 1998).

The purpose of this article is to present a new construct called job embeddedness. We believe that it is a key factor in understanding why people stay on their jobs. First, we review the existing literature on organizational attachment; second, we define job embeddedness; and third, we describe how it is similar to and different from major constructs in the attachment literature. Next, we report empirical development of a measure of job embeddedness, describe its reliability and validity, and test its ability to predict voluntary turnover against that of other constructs. Finally, we discuss how employers can increase or decrease embeddedness and thereby influence subsequent employee propensities to stay in or leave a job.

THE ATTACHMENT LITERATURE

Most of the current theory and research on voluntary turnover springs from the ideas of March and Simon (1958) on the perceived ease and desirability of leaving one’s job. The perceived ease of movement is reflected by job alternatives, and the perceived desirability of movement is usually taken to mean job satisfaction. The traditional wisdom is that people become dissatisfied with their jobs, search for alternatives, compare those options with their current jobs using an expected-value-like decision process, and leave if any of the alternatives are judged to be better than their current situation (Mobley, 1977). Job attitudes combined with job alternatives predict intent to leave, which is the direct antecedent to turnover.

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Traditional Attitude Models

The research investigating the traditional attitude-driven process and its component parts has been extensive. (Maertz and Campion [1998] and Hom and Griffeth [1995] provide excellent reviews.) The two most frequently tested attitudinal constructs have been job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In general, empirical results suggest satisfaction and commitment have consistent, statistically significant, and negative relationships with turnover (e.g., Jaros, 1997). Some of the current research, moreover, modifies traditional attitudinal measures or introduces new attitude constructs. For example, Irving, Coleman, and Cooper (1997) provided a new measure of occupational commitment, and Shore and Tetrick (1991) developed and tested a new measure of perceived organizational support. Other researchers have suggested that justice perceptions (Aquino, Griffeth, Allen, & Hom, 1997) and burnout (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998) influence these attitudes, which in turn affect turnover. When considered together, this body of research expands academic understanding of which attitudes lead to turnover as well as the causes of these attitudes.

The traditional attitude model also suggests that negative attitudes combine with job search to predict leaving (Blau, 1993). Of course, whether a search is successful or not partly depends on the job market. Bretz, Boudreau, and Judge (1994) found that job search is frequently unsuccessful. In addition, Gerhart (1990) concluded that perceptions of the job market (general perception of job opportunities) predicted turnover but that search was not as important. Carsten and Spector (1987) found that the attitude-turnover relationship was higher when unemployment rates were low (jobs were available) rather than high. Thus, most of the traditional models of turnover (e.g., Hom & Griffeth, 1995; March & Simon, 1958; Mobley, 1977; Price & Mueller, 1981; Steers & Mowday, 1981), include two major categories of predictor variables, one emphasizing job attitudes (like satisfaction and commitment) and one emphasizing ease of movement (reflected in perceived alternatives and job search behavior).

Although much of the research described above has shown significant results, the findings are modest, at best. In their quantitative reviews, for example, Hom and Griffeth (1995) and Griffeth and colleagues (2000) reported that attitudinal variables control only about 4 to 5 percent of the variance in turnover. Steel and Griffeth (1989) and Griffeth et al. (2000) reported even weaker findings for the effect on leaving of perceived opportunities but slightly stronger results for the effect of intention to search. In their narrative review, Maertz and Campion (1998) concluded that, although the links among attitude, perceived alternative, search, and turnover are consistent but weak, many other meaningful topics have been neglected.

Different Directions

A number of researchers have attempted to break away from the attitudes and alternatives model generally prescribed by the theorists mentioned above. For example, Hulin's (1991) work on a general withdrawal construct has broadened understanding of both the predictors of and the criteria for organizational attachment (such as lateness and absences). Barrick and Mount (1996) and Chan (1996), moreover, have successfully investigated the effect of individual differences (such as conscientiousness) on turnover. However, the foundations for job embeddedness are three other sets of ideas that have emerged from this growing literature.

Nonwork factors. First, a body of empirical research suggests that many off-the-job factors are important for attachment. The original turnover models of Price and Mueller (1981), Steers and Mowday (1981), and Mobley (1982) include such "nonwork" influences as family attachments and conflicts between work and family roles. More recent research on "spillover" models explains how family and work life are related (Marshall, Chadwick, & Marshall, 1992). Cohen (1995), for example, shows how nonwork commitments like family, hobbies, and church influence job attitudes and attachment. Lee and Maurer (1999), moreover, found that having children at home and a spouse were better predictors of leaving a job than organizational commitment.

Other organization-focused predictors. Second, a variety of factors have been empirically associated with retention that are not attitudinal but organizational. Inducements to stay can derive from working with groups or on certain projects that create types of commitment other than the attraction a person has for his or her job or organization. For example, many companies use teams to induce attachments (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Reichers (1985) labeled these attachments "constituent commitments" and includes attachment to unions, teams, and other work-related groups.

New turnover theory. Third, in research on the unfolding model of turnover (Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, & Hill, 1999), the cited authors describe different ways people decide to leave organizations, identifying four distinct
paths. From our perspective, the interesting points are that many people who leave (1) are relatively satisfied with their jobs, (2) don't search for other jobs before leaving, and (3) leave because of some sort of precipitating event (which Lee and colleagues call a shock) rather than because of a negative attitude. In addition, the content or issues involved with shocks frequently occur off the job; a spouse relocating is an example. Thus, these results provide clues as to why the attitude-search models only predict modestly well who leaves jobs. In many cases, negative attitudes or job search are simply not associated with leaving (Campion, 1991). Collectively, these different and nontraditional ideas helped us to develop the job embeddedness construct.

**JOB EMBEDDEDNESS: A NEW CONSTRUCT**

Job embeddedness represents a broad constellation of influences on employee retention. Two research-related ideas that help explain the core of this construct are embedded figures and field theory (Lewin, 1951). Embedded figures, which are images used in a psychological test, are immersed in their backgrounds. Attached to their backgrounds and hard to separate from them, embedded figures become part of the surroundings. Field theory presents a similar vision, the idea that people have a perceptual life space in which the aspects of their lives are represented and connected. These connections can be few or many and close or distant. Drawing on these ideas, we can describe job embeddedness as like a net or a web in which an individual can become stuck. One who is highly embedded has many links that are close together (not highly differentiated). Moreover, the content of the parts may vary considerably, suggesting that one can be enmeshed or embedded in many different ways. It is this overall level of embeddedness, rather than specific elements of embeddedness, that is our central focus.

The critical aspects of job embeddedness are (1) the extent to which people have links to other people or activities, (2) the extent to which their jobs and communities are similar to or fit with the other aspects of their life spaces, and, (3) the ease with which links can be broken—what they would give up if they left, especially if they had to physically move to other cities or homes. We labeled these three dimensions “links,” “fit,” and “sacrifice,” and they are important both on and off the job. This three-by-two matrix suggests six dimensions: links, fit, and sacrifice associated with an individual’s organization and with his or her community.

**Links**

Links are characterized as formal or informal connections between a person and institutions or other people. Embeddedness suggests that a number of strands connect an employee and his or her family in a social, psychological, and financial web that includes work and nonwork friends, groups, and the community and the physical environment in which he or she lives. The higher the number of links between the person and the web, the more she or he is bound to job and organization. We recognize that certain links may be more important than others and that these differences may be population-specific. However, given our broad conceptualization, we define links broadly as discernable connections.

A variety of research streams suggest that there is normative pressure to stay on a job, deriving from family, work team members, and other colleagues (Maertz, Stevens, Campion, & Fernandez, 1996; Prestholdt, Lane, & Mathews, 1987). O'Reilly, Caldwell, and Barnett (1989) used the term “social integration” to describe the at-work part of the linking process. Furthermore, a study by Abelson (1987) assessed variables related to both on- and off-the-job links. He found that being older, being married, having more tenure, and having children requiring care were all associated with an employee's being more likely to stay than to leave. Cohen (1995), moreover, specifically mentioned hobbies and church-related activities as factors that can influence commitment. Thus, people have many links among the various aspects of their lives. Leaving their jobs and perhaps their homes can sever or require the rearrangement of some of these links.

**Fit**

Fit is defined as an employee’s perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization and with his or her environment. According to our theory, an employee’s personal values, career goals, and plans for the future must fit with the larger corporate culture and the demands of his or her immediate job (job knowledge, skills, and abilities). In addition, a person will consider how well he or she fits the community and surrounding environment. We posit that the better the fit, the higher the likelihood that an employee will feel professionally and personally tied to an organization.

In studying voluntary turnover, for example, O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991) found that "misfits" terminated slightly faster than "fits," but only after 20 months of tenure. Chatman (1991) later reported that when organizational entry pro-
duced poor person-organization fit, employees were likely to leave an organization. Chan (1996) suggested that having one's personal attributes fit with one's job may decrease turnover, and Villanova, Bernard, Johnson, and Dahmus (1994) found that lack of job compatibility predicted turnover. Cable and Judge (1996), Cable and Parsons (1999), and Werbel and Gilliland (1999) reported that people select jobs on the basis of value congruence and that employers try to hire on that basis. Many socialization practices follow similar processes. More specifically, initial job choice and socialization are related to perceived fit, which in turn affects turnover.

Thus, a person's fit with job and organization relates to attachments to the organization. We believe that there are similar community dimensions of fit as well. The weather, amenities, and general culture of the location in which one resides are further examples. In addition, outdoor activities (such as fishing and skiing), political and religious climates, and entertainment activities (college or professional sports, music, theater) vary dramatically by region and location. Most important, these assessments of fit may be independent of job or organization fit ("I love IBM, I hate New York"). Relocation would obviously require a recalibration of fit, but even a new job without relocation could disturb an employee's general patterns, with, for instance, new work hours or a different commute.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice captures the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving a job. For example, leaving an organization implies personal losses like giving up colleagues, interesting projects, or perks. The more an employee would give up when leaving, the more difficult it will be for him or her to sever employment with the organization (Shaw, Delery, Jenkins, & Gupta, 1998). Though comparable salary and benefits may be easily found in an environment of low unemployment, the switching costs, such as new health care or pension plans, are real and relevant. Moreover, nonportable benefits, like stock options or defined benefit pensions, may involve sacrifices. These latter factors have been shown to be related to turnover (Gupta & Jenkins, 1980).

Less visible, but still important potential sacrifices incurred through leaving an organization include opportunities for job stability and advancement (Shaw et al., 1998). In addition, various advantages accrue to an individual who stays. Time in rank can determine your order in picking an office. Sabbaticals are granted after six years of employment at many universities. Taking a new job means giving up these accrued advantages.

Community sacrifices (as well as links and fit to some extent) are mostly an issue if one has to relocate. Leaving a community that is attractive and safe and in which one is liked or respected can be hard. One might have to give up the football tickets or ballet seats that took 20 years of seniority to obtain. Of course, one can change jobs but stay in the same home. But even then, various conveniences, like an easy commute or the ability to be home at certain times owing to flextime may be lost by changing jobs. Perks that affect an employee's private life, such as day care or vehicles provided by the company, may also disappear. Although off-the-job embeddedness may be more crucial when relocation is involved, we suspect it will be important even for situations only requiring a change in jobs. In addition, if people are embedded, they may remove job alternatives that require relocation from the set of job options they consider.

CONSTRUCT COMPARISONS

In our previous section, we cited some of the research that supported ideas incorporated into our six job embeddedness dimensions. However, it is also important that we differentiate job embeddedness from similar constructs and measures already in the literature. We will start at the overall embeddedness level and progress to a discussion of the six dimensions.

The term "embeddedness" has been used in the sociological literature to explain the process by which social relations influence and constrain economic action (Granovetter, 1985; Uzzi, 1996, 1997). The idea of social networks as a constraint is similar to our "stuckness" idea. However, the sociologists' use of the construct is far broader than ours in terms of the units of analysis and the dependent variables. Whereas sociologists focus on individuals, groups, and organizations and a wide variety of economic actions, we focus more narrowly on individuals staying on their jobs.

Attitudinal Competitors: Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction

Hom and Griffeth (1995) and Griffeth and colleagues (2000) reported meta-analyses of the main predictors of turnover. Job satisfaction (67 samples; 24,566 subjects) and organizational commitment (67 samples; 27,540 subjects) are by far the main attitudinal variables researched. In contrast, job involvement is third, with 16 samples and 7,666 sub-
jects. All three are significantly related to retention, although involvement has far weaker relationships.

The problem with making comparisons between organizational commitment and job embeddedness is that there are numerous definitions and measures of organizational commitment in the literature. However, the Allen and Meyer (1990) three-dimensional model (with affective, continuance, and normative dimensions) is the most current and widely used. Thus, we use it for comparison purposes.

Initially, it is important to point out that organizational commitment is concerned with organizational issues. Thus, half of the job embeddedness construct is simply not covered by organizational commitment. Also, two of the factors, affective and normative commitment, are conceptually quite different from job embeddedness. Affective commitment reflects one's liking for a job and emotional attachment to an organization. In other words, people stay because of their positive affect and feelings about their organizations. Some of our on-the-job factors, such as fit, may reflect some positive affect toward jobs, but they may also reflect a relatively nonaffective judgment. People may stay specifically because they have found or created niches in their organizations that match their needs and talents. Cable and Parsons suggested that person-organization fit "represents a cognitive belief rather than an emotional response" (1999: 24). Thus, our embeddedness construct is not as affect-driven as the Allen and Meyer (1990) organizational commitment construct.

In addition, the normative commitment dimension of the Allen and Meyer model springs from a sense of obligation. People stay because they feel they ought to. Although some of our organizational links may increase a sense of obligation (for instance, to coworkers), other links we measured, like the sheer number of teams or committees an employee works with, are not part of their construct.

In contrast, the continuance commitment dimension has some aspects that are fairly similar conceptually to our organization-related sacrifice dimension. Utilizing Becker's (1960) idea of side bets, Allen and Meyer defined continuance commitment as "the magnitude and/or number of investments (or side-bets) individuals make and a perceived lack of alternatives" (1990: 4). These side bets include things like job effort, friendships, specific skills developed, and "political deals" (Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, & Sincich, 1993).

Items included in Allen and Meyer's (1990) continuance commitment measure are similar at a general level to items that we used to assess organization-related sacrifice. For instance, one of their items is "It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to"). However, there are also four items assessing the perceived lack of alternatives in Allen and Meyer's measure (such as "I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving my organization"). Our items for organization-related sacrifice differ in two major ways from those for continuance commitment. First, we include no items assessing job alternatives. We see that as a separate construct that should be measured separately. Second, instead of just using general items, we assess specific entities that people feel they would have to give up if they left their jobs (for instance, freedom, retirement benefits, perks, compensation, health care, and promotional opportunities). Thus, our measure is more specific and includes elements not typically included in the side bet idea.

A similar perspective emerges in a review of the job satisfaction construct and measures. First, the focus of job satisfaction is on-the-job, not off-the-job, concerns. Second, there are multiple measures of job satisfaction (such as the Job Descriptive Index and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire), and most have multiple dimensions. These dimensions include attributes of an employee's work environment, supervision, coworkers, and pay (Griffeth et al., 2000). Organization-related sacrifice is meant to focus on what people would "give up" if they left their jobs. It does not include items assessing affective reactions to the work itself, supervisors, or coworkers.

 Nonetheless, we do include items on compensation and benefits (health care and retirement). Thus, organization-related sacrifice has some conceptual similarity to compensation satisfaction. Heneman and Schwab's (1985) Pay Satisfaction Questionnaire (PSQ) is the most frequently used instrument in current compensation research. Although it does include satisfaction with pay and benefits, the PSQ also includes items referring to raises, the pay structure (distribution) in an organization, and the procedures involved with pay administration. Thus, the PSQ includes constructs and items that are not conceptualized as part of job embeddedness.

In summary, organizational commitment and job satisfaction have some similarities to and some differences from job embeddedness. These two well-researched job attitudes do assess on-the-job dimensions. But their content is affective and, although some of their subdimensions have some similarity with organization-related sacrifice, job embeddedness differs from these well-known job attitudes in significant ways.
Other Constructs Similar to Job Embeddedness Dimensions

Besides job satisfaction and organizational commitment, other specific constructs have some overlap with job embeddedness dimensions. For example, both the cost of quitting and job investment constructs have aspects resembling organization-related sacrifice. Cost of quitting was part of Mobley’s early (1977) model and was meant to reflect March and Simon’s (1958) perceived-ease-of-movement concept. Mobley (1977, 1982) included, as costs of quitting, things like the “loss of seniority, vested benefits and the like” (1977: 238), which combine with the “expected utility” of search. The research on the cost of quitting (e.g., Hom, Griffeth, & Sellaro, 1984; Hom & Hulin, 1981) includes three general items (one is “It is easy for me to leave my present job”) as well as measures of the cost of searching. Like the continuance commitment idea, cost of quitting is general and includes search items; organization-related sacrifice, however, assesses specific things to be given up and does not include search.

The job investments idea comes from the work of Farrell and Rusbult (1981; Rusbult & Farrell, 1983). They developed a commitment model to predict turnover in which job investments is one of the four main factors (with job rewards, job costs, and alternative quality) contributing to commitment. Conceptually, job investments include things that are “intrinsic to the job (e.g., years of service, portable training, non-vested portions of retirement programs)” (Rusbult & Farrell, 1983: 431) and resources that are external but tied to the job, such as friends at work, housing arrangements, and other extraneous benefits. They had 20 items assessing these specific contributors to commitment, but the measure they used empirically had only 3 general items (“In general, how much have you invested in this job?” “All things considered, to what extent are there activities/events/persons/objects associated with your job that you would lose if you were to leave?” and “How much does your investment in this job compare to what most people have invested in their jobs?”). The idea of losing things as a result of leaving is very similar to our organization-related sacrifice construct, and many of their specific items (such as home ownership, spousal employment, and community ties) reflect our community-related sacrifice and links-to-community dimensions. However, job investments, as measured by the 3 items above, includes elements not in organization-related sacrifice as well as a relative comparison idea (their third item) that appears to invoke equity or fairness judgments. In short, the measure they used is more general than organization-related sacrifice, which measures specific factors an employee would have to give up by leaving. In addition, Rusbult and Farrell see the job investments—turnover relationship as mediated by commitment, while we make no such claim.

There are also two constructs that partially overlap with our fit-to-organization dimension. The work of Schneider (1987), Chatman (1989), and Kristof (1996) discusses the idea of person-organization fit. More recently, person-job fit has been researched by Saks and Ashforth (1997) and Werbel and Gilliland (1999). In general, these constructs refer to compatibility, described as the “congruence of the personality traits, beliefs and values of individual persons with the culture, strategic needs, norms and values of organizations” (Netemeyer, Boles, McKee, & McMurrin, 1997: 88) for person-organization fit and the congruence of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) with one’s job for person-job fit. The measures include items like “To what extent are the values of the organization similar to your own values?” (Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

Our dimension of fit to organization incorporates a number of the separate fit ideas from this literature. Our items ask how well employees perceive they fit with their coworkers, groups, jobs, companies, and cultures. In addition, since there is confusion in the literature about the bases of fit, with personality, values, needs, and goals all identified as bases (Kristof, 1996), we simply asked for an overall fit perception without referring to needs, as is apparent in the above items. Thus, our construct is more encompassing than the separate fit constructs in the literature.

The second construct that may appear similar to fit to organization is organizational identity (see Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). Unfortunately, there is little agreement on the definition of this construct (Albert, 1998), with both macro (organization) and micro (individual) referents used. At the individual level, organizational identity comes from the social identity literature and refers to “a perceived oneness with an organization and the experience of the organization’s successes and failures as one’s own” (Mael & Ashforth, 1992: 103). In doing research on schools, Mael and Ashforth (1992) used items like “When someone criticizes [name of school] it feels like a personal insult” and “This school’s successes are my successes.”

We think that organizational identity is fundamentally different from fit to organization. In particular, organizational identity involves a far broader and deeper idea than fit. Ashforth (1998), for example, said it involves the fusion of self and organization. Gioia (1998) argued that it is funda-
mental to the conception of humanity. In contrast, we see fit as assessing degree of similarity on a few specific dimensions.

There is also one construct that is somewhat similar to our idea of links to organization. Reichers defined constituency commitment as “a process of identification with the goals of an organization’s multiple constituencies” (1985: 465). Research using this concept asks “How attached are you to the following people and groups (top management, supervisor and work group)” (Becker, 1992; Hunt & Morgan, 1994). In our conceptualization, links to organization instead focuses only on attachments that develop over time on the job and that embed someone. We assess the length of time employees have been in their jobs and organizations, along with the numbers of coworkers, teams, and committees with which they are involved. However, we do not assess attachment to top management or an employee’s identification with the goals of various groups. These are separate concepts.

Finally, there are constructs and measures that have some similarity with our links to community. Price and Mueller (1981) suggested that kinship responsibilities may limit employees’ ease of movement. They saw the variable as reflecting “obligations to relatives in the community” and used items assessing marital status and the numbers of children and relatives in a community (Blegen, Mueller, & Price, 1988). We should add that investigators interested in relocation (Miller, 1976) or in expatriates leaving job assignments, situations in which an employee changes job and location but stays with the same organization, have also pointed to family entanglements as important (Shaffer & Harrison, 1998). For example, Miller (1976), Spitz (1986), and Turban, Campion, and Eyring (1992) all suggested that relocation is severely affected if a spouse (or family member) does not want to move. Turban and colleagues (1992) used the kinship responsibility measure in their research, as did Shaffer and Harrison (1998).

The kinship responsibility idea is very similar to our links to community, both conceptually and empirically. However, our concept and measure are broader. Going beyond kinship, we focus on a variety of other links that inhibit changing jobs or moving, such as home ownership, having close friends living nearby, and links with organizations in the community.

The last construct we will mention is subjective norm. Ajzen and Fishbein’s (1977) attitude model suggests that behaviors are influenced by the extent to which “others” think an individual should engage in those behaviors and the person’s motivation to comply with these expectations. A few research-ers (e.g., Hom & Hulin, 1981; Hom et al., 1984; Parker & Dyer, 1976), have used these ideas to predict turnover, composing items like “Most of the people whose opinion I respect, think I should leave my present job” (Newman, 1974). In many cases, the subject responds to these questions with respect to various reference groups (such as friends, family, and employer).

Links to community is different in a variety of ways. It refers to links other than those with people, such as owning a home or belonging to a community organization. Also, links to community only refers to off-the-job links, while subjective norm refers to both people who are on and those who are off the job. In addition, links to community only assesses the existence of links (our web, or “stuckness” idea), not whether family or friends want the focal person to quit her or his job. People may feel constrained simply by having the personal links and connections, independent of how other people feel.

In summary, there are clearly ideas in the literature that are similar to the dimensions of job embeddedness. However, there are also important differences. Job embeddedness is broader than any of the constructs discussed in the literature. It includes an assessment of some factors both on and off the job that are not measured elsewhere. In addition, its constituent dimensions are less affective than most of the constructs that dominate this literature: Links are clearly nonaffective, and fit and sacrifice are only indirectly or secondarily affective. In sum, at the construct level, job embeddedness is conceptually unique in the turnover literature.

Summary and Hypotheses

Job embeddedness is conceived as a key mediating construct between specific on-the-job and off-the-job factors and employee retention. It represents a focus on the accumulated, generally nonaffective, reasons why an employee would not leave a job, which comprise a sort of stuckness, inertia, or bias toward the status quo. Each of the three dimensions—fit, links, and sacrifice—has an organizational and a community component. Though both “organization” and “community” are abstractions that are socially constructed, they capture domains in which people can be embedded. Also, the effects of these six different factors may vary across people, jobs, and such circumstances as an employee’s age or an employing organization’s size. People can become embedded in many ways; the process may systematically vary by occupation or personality. In sum, our focus is more on the
totality of embedding forces that keep a person on a job than on the negative attitudes that prompt the person to leave the job. From this perspective, job embeddedness may be seen as a higher-order aggregate of forces for retention. This overall focus on the factors that lead to employee retention gave rise to the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1.** Job embeddedness is negatively correlated with employee intent to leave and subsequent voluntary turnover.

**Hypothesis 2.** Job embeddedness improves the prediction of voluntary turnover, going above and beyond that accounted for by job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

**Hypothesis 3.** Job embeddedness accounts for prediction of voluntary turnover that is above and beyond that accounted for by perceived alternatives and job search.

**Hypothesis 4.** Job embeddedness accounts for the prediction of voluntary turnover that is above and beyond that accounted for by variables representing the desirability of movement (job satisfaction and organizational commitment) and variables representing ease of movement (perceived alternatives and job search).

**METHODS**

**Overview and Samples**

Our general research strategy was to assess personal characteristics, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job embeddedness, job search, perceived alternatives, and intent to leave in an initial data collection (time 1) and to assess actual turnover in a second data collection (time 2). We contacted, visited, and gained access to data from two organizations that operated in environments characterized by relatively high turnover. The first organization was a regional grocery store chain, and the second was a community-based hospital. The labor market was exceptionally tight for both organizations, with unemployment well below 5 percent. However, because not all respondents identified themselves, for calculations involving turnover we analyzed 208 surveys.

The average age of respondents was 37.57 years (s.d. = 13.02); 77 percent were women, and 38 percent were married. They had worked in their current positions for an average 6.15 years (s.d. = 6.88), for the organization for an average 7.00 years (s.d. = 7.29), and in the industry for 9.94 years (s.d. = 8.84). To test for response bias, we obtained basic information about the survey population from the organization. We compared the 177 respondents who provided their names on the questionnaire to the remaining 523 employees who received questionnaires. The “nonrespondents” thus included some who responded to the survey without disclosing their names. The respondents were not different from the nonrespondents in terms of age, tenure with the firm, and job level. However, respondents did appear to differ from nonrespondents in terms of gender (t = 3.83, p < .01), with women returning the survey at a higher rate than men. Consequently, gender was used as a control variable throughout the analyses. Moreover, the response rates from different stores appeared to be highly similar (χ² = 9.31, n.s.). So the various store samples appeared to be fairly similar to the population of employees in demographic attributes.

**Hospital respondents.** Surveys were mailed to a random sample of 500 employees of the hospital in June 1998; 150 were nurses, and the other 350 were from administration, maintenance, admitting, the cafeteria, and special services. Self-addressed, stamped envelopes were again provided. Confidentiality was guaranteed in a letter sent in advance of the survey. We also sent follow-up letters to remind employees to participate. The hospital employees returned 232 surveys, a response rate of 46.4 percent. However, because not all respondents identified themselves, for calculations involving turnover we analyzed 208 surveys.

The average age of the hospital respondents was 43.10 years (s.d. = 10.21); 84 percent were women, and 60 percent were married. They had worked in their current positions for an average 6.22 years (s.d. = 6.39), for the organization for an average 7.92 years (s.d. = 7.18), and in the industry for an average 16.82 years (s.d. = 10.41). To test for response bias, we compared the 208 respondents who provided their names on the questionnaire to the other 940 employees of the hospital. The respondents were not different from nonrespondents in terms of gender, tenure with the organization,
job level, or job type. Thus, sample respondents are fairly similar to the population of employees with respect to their major demographic attributes.

Measures

**Personal characteristics.** For both the grocery store and hospital samples, we measured age, gender, marital status, job level, and tenure in job, organization, and industry. Simple, fill-in-the-blank questions were used.

**Job embeddedness.** The items used to assess embeddedness came from four sources. First, there were obvious demographic and descriptive items available to assess marital state, number of children, house ownership, years at one's job, and so forth. Second, items from traditional attitudinal measures were modified for our purposes, especially for job fit (for instance, "My job utilizes my skills and abilities well") and job-related sacrifice ("The benefits are good on this job"). Third, we met weekly for over a year to discuss this construct, clarify its components, and generate items. Fourth, in 21 preliminary interviews at two grocery stores from the participating chain and in 12 interviews at the hospital, we pretested the relevance of the items and generated additional ones. None of the 33 employees who were interviewed participated in the survey. Our initial questionnaire (used at the grocery store) had 42 items that were written to assess our six dimensions (links, fit, and sacrifice, on and off the job). Some used a Likert-type format and others had yes, no, or fill-in-the-blank response options. At the hospital, we had six additional items based on our interviews and on deliberation that occurred after the data were gathered at the grocery stores. Three of these items were added to links to community, and three were added to fit to organization. The final set of items is shown in the Appendix.

**Job satisfaction.** Among the grocery clerks, we used Spector's (1997) Job Satisfaction Survey, a 36-item measure specifically applicable to service organizations. To assess overall job satisfaction, an averaged composite of all 36 items was used ($\alpha = .92$), and for the facets of job satisfaction, Spector's subscales were used ($\alpha$'s = .84, pay; .77, promotion; .88, supervision; .70, benefits; .82, contingent rewards; .53, operating conditions; .63, coworkers; .80, nature of work; .75, communication). Among the hospital employees, management's concerns about questionnaire length did not allow use of Spector's scale. Instead, we measured overall satisfaction with an averaged composite ($\alpha = .85$) of the following three items: "All in all, I am satisfied with my job." "In general, I don't like my job (reverse-scored)." And "In general, I like working here."

**Organizational commitment.** To assess overall organizational commitment, we averaged ratings on all items of Meyer and Allen's (1997) three-dimensional measure ($\alpha = .84$, store, and .87, hospital). For the three dimensions, Meyer and Allen's subscales were used. For the grocery and hospital employees, respectively, alphas were .86 and .89 for affective commitment, .85 and .81 for calculative commitment, and .71 and .81 for normative commitment.

**Job alternatives.** These two items were adapted from Lee and Mowday (1987): "What is the probability that you can find an acceptable alternative to your job?" and "If you search for an alternative job within a year, what are the chances you can find an acceptable job?" These items were averaged to reflect perceived alternatives ($\alpha = .93$, both samples) and had a five-point response format. Although this measure has been used in previous research, it suffers from two limitations noted by Steel and Griffeth (1989): With only two items, it is somewhat simplistic, and when analyses are conducted within a sample, the variance is limited. Both of these problems may inhibit the measure's relationship with turnover.

**Job search behavior index.** We used Kopelman, Rovenpor, and Millsap's (1992) ten-item scale to measure actual search activity. It includes questions such as "During the past year have you 1) revised your resume, 2) sent copies of your resume to a prospective employer, 3) read the classified advertisements in the newspaper, 4) gone on a job interview, and 5) talked to friends or relatives about getting a new job? The response format is yes/no, and the alphas were .80 and .82 for the two samples.

**Intentions to leave.** Three items were adapted from Hom et al. (1984): "Do you intend to leave the organization in the next 12 months?", "How strongly do you feel about leaving the organization within the next 12 months?", and "How likely is it that you will leave the organization in the next 12 months?" An averaged composite was used in the analysis ($\alpha = .95$ and .97).

**Voluntary turnover.** Both organizations provided a list of all voluntary and involuntary leavers for a 12-month period following each survey administration. Maertz and Campion defined voluntary turnover incidents as "Instances wherein management agrees that the employee had the physical opportunity to continue employment with the company, at the time of termination" (1998: 50). To confirm that their leaving had been voluntary, we attempted to contact all leavers. Because some of
them had also left their localities, we were only able to contact 15 of the 20 grocery chain voluntary leavers. However, this proved to be an important check on the reporting system, as 3 of these leavers interviewed indicated that their departures were somewhat less than voluntary. (They felt pressure to leave but were not fired.) To be conservative, we omitted these 3 people and all the involuntary leavers from the analyses. In the hospital sample, we were able to contact 20 of 27 voluntary leavers, each of whom reported leaving voluntarily. Thus, the p-values were approximately 10 percent for grocery employees (total voluntary leavers out of self-identified respondent sample) and 13 percent for hospital employees.

RESULTS

Development of Job Embeddedness

Job embeddedness is an aggregate formed from six dimensions (Law, Wong, & Mobley, 1998). More specifically, its indicators are causes of embeddedness and not reflections (MacCallum & Browne, 1993). The survey instrument measures three causal—not effect—indicators of the dimensions for embeddedness: fit, links, and sacrifice. Note that our construct is not a latent factor that influences effect indicators. Put another way, we do not view being embedded as causing a person to go out and get married, buy a house, or increase links with his or her organization. Rather, those activities cause the person to become embedded. In a path diagram, causal arrows would go from the causal indicators (items) to the six dimensions and from the dimensions to the aggregate construct (Law et al., 1998).

In addition, it should be noted that job embeddedness is not a unified construct—it is a multidimensional aggregate of the on- and off-the-job forces that might keep someone at a job. We did not expect the six dimensions to be highly correlated with one another (although some might be). For example, we had no reason to believe that on-the-job links would be related to off-the-job sacrifice or that on-the-job fit would be related to off-the-job links.

On the basis of our definition of the construct and its constituent parts, we first assigned each of the survey questions to one of the six embeddedness dimensions. For the data gathered from the grocery store employees, we then conducted an exploratory factor analysis on the items in each of the six dimensions to assess whether the items within each dimension were reasonably correlated. Third, we calculated alpha reliabilities for each dimension, not because they were particularly valid for causal indicators, but simply to obtain some evidence that the items within a dimension were internally consistent (Bollen & Lennox, 1991). The Appendix summarizes the final set of items derived from these factor analyses and reports the alphas for the two samples. Fourth, we created an averaged composite variable for each dimension. The number of items per dimension ranged from three to ten. Finally, we created an aggregate measure of embeddedness by computing the mean of the six dimensions (a mean of means). Thus, the composite equally weights the influence of the distinct dimensions. For the hospital employees, we repeated the basic process. However, as noted in the Measures section, at the hospital we added six items to the questionnaire and composites (shown in the Appendix). The alpha reliability (using all the items) for this overall measure was .85 for the grocery employees and .87 for the hospital employees. Tables 1 and 2 show the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables in this study.

Descriptive Information

The correlations show that embeddedness is related to complementary work-related constructs. Embeddedness is positively, significantly, and moderately correlated with job satisfaction (r's = .43 and .57, grocery and hospital, both p < .01) and organizational commitment (r's = .44 and .54, p < .01). As further evidence of convergent validity, fit to organization—the dimension hypothesized to be most closely related to the above-mentioned affective measures—is positively and strongly correlated with job satisfaction (r's = .52 and .72, p < .01) and organizational commitment (r's = .58 and .52, p < .01). Also, embeddedness is negatively related to job search (r's = -.24 and -.29, p < .01) and job alternatives (r's = -.12, p < .10, and -.07, n.s.), as we expected. The more people are embedded, the less they search and the lower the probability they perceive alternatives. Indicative of discriminant validity and as expected, the nonaffective dimensions of embeddedness appear only weakly related to the traditional measures of employee attachment. For example, organizational links is not highly correlated with job satisfaction (r's = .03 and .10, n.s.) or organizational commitment (r's = .15, p < .05, and .28, p < .01). Also as expected, the community-based subdimensions of embeddedness exhibit generally lower correlations with overall job satisfaction and overall organizational commitment than their organization-based counterparts. In sum, data from these two samples...
indicated evidence of convergent and discriminant validity for job embeddedness.

**Tests of Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1 posits that embeddedness will be negatively correlated with employees’ intentions to leave and with turnover. As noted in Tables 1 and 2, the product-moment correlations in the two samples between embeddedness and intentions to leave are −.41 and −.47 (p < .01), and the point-biserial correlations between embeddedness and voluntary turnover are −.24 and −.25 (p < .01).

These results suggest that a negative relationship exists between being embedded in an organization and intentions to leave as well as between embedding and actual voluntary leaving. Hypothesis 1 is supported across both samples.

Hypothesis 2 asserts that job embeddedness will improve the prediction of voluntary turnover, augmenting prediction attributable to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Tables 3 and 4 present the results when turnover is logistically regressed onto the overall aggregated measures. Among grocery employees, job embeddedness significantly improves the prediction of turnover.

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**TABLE 1**

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations, Grocery Store Chain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Voluntary turnover</td>
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<td>2. Intent to leave</td>
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<td>1.24</td>
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<td>3. Job satisfaction</td>
<td>7.36</td>
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<td>−.22** −.40**</td>
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<td>4. Organizational commitment</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.50</td>
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<td>5. Job alternatives</td>
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<td>1.20</td>
<td>.23** .32** −.09 −.44**</td>
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<td>6. Job search behavior</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>−.18** .43** −.30** −.41** .36**</td>
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<td>7. Job embeddedness</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>−.24** −.41** .43** .44** −.12 −.24**</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Fit to community</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>−.02 −.09 .19** .07 .08 −.03 .66**</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Fit to organization</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>−.18** −.53** .52** .58** −.17** −.32** .58** .19</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Links to community</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>−.18** −.12 .04 .08 −.02 −.12 .63** −.28** .13</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Links to organization</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>−.11 −.14* .03 .15* −.11 −.06 .43** .08 .08 .22**</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Community-related sacrifice</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>−.12 .17** −.14 −.04 .01 .37** .66** .13** .26** .19</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Organization-related sacrifice</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>−.22** −.51** .65** .68** −.20** −.32** .78** .15* .63** .12 .01 .14</td>
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<td>14. Job embeddedness, community</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>−.14* −.14* .17** .13* −.02 −.03 .56** .85** .19** .47** .20** .88</td>
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<td>15. Job embeddedness, organization</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>−.24** −.57** .60** .64** −.22** −.34** .74** .20** .79** .23** .49** .21</td>
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<td>16. Job satisfaction, pay</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>−.34** −.29** .64** −.32** −.18** −.26** .38** .21** .23** .12 .08 .22</td>
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<td>17. Job satisfaction, promotion</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>−.11 −.26** .67** .30** −.08 −.19** .27** −.01 .36** .01 .10 .05</td>
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<td>18. Job satisfaction, supervision</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>−.06 −.22* .67** .26** .03 −.15* .22** .11 .36** .02 .05 .01</td>
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<td>19. Job satisfaction, fringe benefits</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>−.09 −.26** .50** .16** .02 −.17** .32** .18** .24** .01 .01 .19**</td>
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<td>20. Job satisfaction, contingent rewards</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>−.14* −.24** .81** .36** −.06 −.23** .32** .13** .40** .01 .06 .13</td>
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<td>21. Job satisfaction, operating conditions</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>−.12 .56** .22** −.06 −.14* −.03 −.03 .23** −.25** −.25** −.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. Job satisfaction, coworkers</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>−.33** −.35** .63** .25** −.02 −.20** .43** .27** .41** .17** .09 .24</td>
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<td>23. Job satisfaction, nature of the work</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>−.19** −.48** .64** .50** −.14** −.30** .52** .24** .53** .24** .09 .28</td>
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<td>24. Job satisfaction, communication</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>−.01 −.17** .74** .28** −.01 −.10 .12 .02 .34** −.15* −.08 −.02</td>
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<td>25. Organizational commitment, affective</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>−.17** −.49** .67** .76** −.21** −.36** .42** .07 .61** .01 −.17** .11</td>
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<td>26. Organizational commitment, continuance</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>−.18** −.28** −.01 .66** −.48** −.16*.18** .01 .19** .08 .11 .02</td>
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<td>27. Organizational commitment, normative</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>−.10 −.41** .35** .71** −.19** −.38** .33** .09 .45** .09 −.01 .18**</td>
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* n = 177 for column 1 (turnover); n ranges from 219 to 232 for all other variables. Column 1 reports point-biserial correlations; all other columns report product-moment correlations.

* * p < .05

** p < .01
(Δχ² = 2.58, p < .05; Wald statistic = 2.54, p < .05; pseudo partial r = -.08), after the effects of gender, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment are controlled (Table 3). Among hospital employees, job embeddedness also significantly improves prediction of turnover with the same variables controlled (Δχ² = 5.29, p < .01; Wald statistic = 4.95, p < .01; pseudo partial r = -.14; Table 4). In sum, Hypothesis 2 is supported in both samples.

Note that the p-values reported above are one-tailed (chi-square p's divided by two). One might legitimately ask whether tests of improvement in chi-square should be one-tailed. Because chi-square is derived with squared values, directionality cannot be readily determined via this test statistic (that is, directionality is “squared away”). In response, we note that our concept of job embeddedness clearly specifies a direction (the more embeddedness, the less turnover). In addition, directionality is also explicitly indicated by exponential b and directly tested with the Wald statistic. Thus, there is a theoretical basis and an empirical reason to justify our directional interpretation of chi-square.

Hypothesis 3 holds that job embeddedness will improve prediction of voluntary turnover, going above and beyond perceived alternatives and job search as a predictor. Among the grocery store employees, job embeddedness significantly improves prediction of turnover (Δχ² = 6.18, p < .01; Wald statistic = 5.65, p < .01; pseudo partial r = -.20) after the effects of gender, perceived alternatives, and job search are controlled (Table 3). Among the hospital employees, job embeddedness signifi-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Voluntary turnover</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Intent to leave</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>1.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Job satisfaction</td>
<td>3.94</td>
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</table>

*a n = 208 for column 1 (turnover); n ranges from 221–232 for all other variables. Column 1 reports point-biserial correlations; all other columns report product-moment correlations.

* p < .05

** p < .01
TABLE 3
Results of Logistic Regression Analysis of Voluntary Turnover among Grocery Workers^a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Hypothesis 2</th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Hypothesis 3</th>
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<td>Partial r</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<td>6.18**</td>
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\(^a\) Values of \(b\) above 1.0 indicate a positive effect, values at 1.0 indicate no effect, and values below 1.0 indicate a negative effect.

* \(p < .10\)

** \(p < .05\)

*** \(p < .01\)

One-tailed tests.

TABLE 4
Results of Logistic Regression of Analysis Voluntary Turnover among Hospital Workers^a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>(\Delta \chi^2)</td>
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<td>7.36**</td>
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</table>

\(^a\) Values of \(b\) above 1.0 indicate a positive effect, values at 1.0 indicate no effect, and values below 1.0 indicate a negative effect.

* \(p < .05\)

** \(p < .01\)

*** \(p < .001\)

One-tailed tests.

DISCUSSION

The current study is unique in that it develops and tests a new organizational attachment construct: job embeddedness. It is important to emphasize that embeddedness was conceptualized specifically as reflecting the totality of forces that constrain people from leaving their current employment. It captures those factors that embed and keep an employee in her or his present position. Although other ideas, constructs, and measures significantly improved prediction as well (\(\Delta \chi^2 = 7.36, p < .01\); Wald statistic = 6.76, \(p < .01\); pseudo partial \(r = -.18\)) after gender, perceived alternatives, and job search are controlled (Table 4). Thus, Hypothesis 3 is largely supported.

Hypothesis 4 states that job embeddedness will improve prediction of turnover, augmenting prediction achieved with job satisfaction and organizational commitment (that is, perceived desirability of movement) and perceived alternatives and job search (that is, perceived ease of movement). Among the grocery workers, job embeddedness marginally improved prediction (\(\Delta \chi^2 = 2.37, p < .06\); Wald statistic = 2.31, \(p < .06\); pseudo partial \(r = -.06\)) with gender and the perceived desirability and perceived ease of movement controlled for (Table 3). Among the hospital workers, job embeddedness significantly improved prediction (\(\Delta \chi^2 = 5.67, p < .01\); Wald statistic = 5.20, \(p < .01\); pseudo partial \(r = -.16\)) with these variables controlled (Table 4). In sum, Hypothesis 4 is largely supported.
helped to shape our thinking (and have some empirical associations with parts of embeddedness), job embeddedness, especially its off-the-job components, represents a new perspective on why people stay on their jobs.

The empirical research we have presented provides some initial support for job embeddedness. In two separate investigations, we demonstrated that people who are embedded in their jobs have less intent to leave and do not leave as readily as those who are not embedded (Hypothesis 1). In addition, each of the six components of embeddedness was significantly related to turnover in at least one of the samples (see Tables 1 and 2). These data suggest that our emphasis on some off-the-job and nonaffective causes of turnover has some predictive validity. The data also show that job embeddedness adds to the prediction of turnover attributable to standard measures of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Hypothesis 2) and to that attributable to perceived job alternatives and job search behaviors (Hypothesis 3).

Job embeddedness also goes beyond a combination of measures of the perceived desirability and ease of movement (job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job alternatives, job search) in predicting turnover. Thus, job embeddedness assesses new and meaningful variance in turnover that is in excess of that predicted by the major variables included in almost all the major models of turnover (Hypothesis 4). Our empirical findings show that job embeddedness complements and extends researchers’ understanding of the antecedents to leaving (and staying).

We are pleased with these initial results but would hasten to point out that there are many unanswered questions. Schwab noted two decades ago that “construct validity is often a sequential process” (1980: 10) and that “initial construct validation will likely lead to modification of the instrument and perhaps in the investigator’s definition of the construct” (1980: 10). More recently, Hanisch, Hulin, and Roznowski stated, in a discussion of turnover research, that “it takes time to conceptualize important constructs, refine them, accurately assess them, and then study the antecedents and consequences of these constructs” (1998: 464).

These quotes point to some of the limitations in our work. First, turnover studies using actual turnover as the criterion (instead of intent to leave) take a long time to conduct, usually about two to three years. The research reported here commenced in 1995. Since then, new ideas and research have appeared in the literature. For example, the recent work on socialization (Cable & Judge, 1996; Cable & Parsons, 1999) suggests that socialization practices may be highly related to organizational fit, and work by Barrick and Mount (1996) and by Chan (1996) suggests that conscientiousness may moderate the relationship between embeddedness and turnover. These changes need to be incorporated in future work. Second, the job embeddedness construct is under development. For example, we added some items in the second study reported here, and more changes may occur in the future. But new constructs are always evolving. For example, two popular measures of job satisfaction, the Job Descriptive Index and the Index of Organizational Reactions, have changed substantially over the years (Dunham, Smith, & Brackburn, 1977; Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, & Paul, 1989). Moreover, it is important to point out that, to the extent to which the reliability and validity of job embeddedness is increased through subsequent research and development, the results presented here may be conservative. Third, we clearly did not test job embeddedness against all possible competitors. We started with the two most frequently researched variables (job satisfaction and organizational commitment) and the two variables most frequently cited as reflecting external forces for leaving (search and alternatives). Additional work is needed to see how embeddedness complements and supplements other variables in the literature.

Some empirical and conceptual issues also clearly need further attention. In terms of empirical work, we see three major research directions. First, as mentioned above, the items composing our six dimensions need additional development; some items may need to be dropped and others added. For example, a potentially important organizational factor that we do not now include is the relationship an employee has with his or her supervisor. Having a great boss may be hard to give up (a sacrifice factor). Another example is that items reflecting political or religious ties should perhaps be added to the links-to-community dimension.

A second direction concerns how we decided to include or exclude items. Since job embeddedness is conceived of as a heterogeneous totality of forces, many of which may be independent, high alphas within the six subdimensions and high correlations across dimensions should not necessarily be expected. A global measure of overall embeddedness (such as “How stuck do you feel in your job?”) and global measures of the subdimensions as well may be what we need to decide whether given items and subdimensions are acceptable. For four of the six subdimensions (fit and sacrifice on and off the job), we included a single general item (for fit to organization, it was “I feel like I am a good match for the...
company”). However, these single items are potentially unreliable. Moreover, both links dimensions have no summary item. Having reliable and valid global estimates of overall embeddedness and the six subdimensions would help in any future item analysis.

A third research direction relates to our results with these two samples. At the time that we designed these studies, 1997–98 census data indicated about 15 percent of people relocated (moved) when they changed jobs. In addition, some of our previous research at a hospital suggested about 20 percent of the people who left had relocated. Therefore, we tried to find out whether those who quit in our samples had left their areas. No one we reached had relocated (3 of the grocery clerks and 4 of the hospital workers were no longer at their listed phone numbers: they may have moved but we do not know for sure). These data are important because our off-the-job dimensions assess issues that might be most salient for people considering alternatives that involved moving. However, it is important to note that if the people we didn’t reach had indeed moved, the percentages (3 of 15, 4 of 27) in our studies would fit national norms. In addition, because job embeddedness correlates significantly with search behaviors (−.24 and −.29, p < .01, in the two samples), it can be inferred that highly embedded people search less. For both stayers and leavers, we cannot tell the number of available alternatives that were passed over or discarded because they involved moving. To the extent that moving was not an option for these employees, the results we present are likely to be conservative. Embeddedness may have even stronger effects for people in professions in which changing jobs usually involves changing locations (such as academics).

There is conceptual work to be done as well. We recognize that other constructs control part of the variance in turnover. More specifically, the Wald statistics reported in Tables 3 and 4 clearly show that job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job search, and perceived alternatives control variance in turnover that is not controlled by job embeddedness. We never envisioned job embeddedness as replacing those other constructs. What is needed, then, is a better understanding of the construct space that these variables have in common and of where they differ.

Job embeddedness may also be related to other dependent variables. Although it was designed specifically to predict why people stay on a job (and in that sense, its purpose is different from those of other constructs, such as job satisfaction and organizational identity), job embeddedness may also predict variables that are similarly beneficial to organizations. People who are more embedded, for example, may be absent less, work harder, perform better, and engage in more organizational citizenship behaviors than people who are less embedded. These questions merit further research.

A final conceptual issue that needs attention is whether job embeddedness could actually facilitate leaving. There are two rather indirect ways this could happen. First, people having many links are likely “well networked.” Strong networks, especially off-the-job, might lead to unsolicited job offers or knowledge about other positions. Also, being highly embedded at work might lead to work-family role conflicts, and such conflicts might result in turnover. Thus, although job embeddedness focuses on how stuck employees are in their current situations, such stickiness might result in secondary circumstances that eventually cause them to leave.

A more general critical question is why researchers and others should care about embeddedness. How important is it? What does it add to the literature and to our understanding of leaving and staying? Obviously, one argument for its importance is the statistical findings that support the hypotheses. However, one could argue that these increments are not terribly large and may not be large enough to warrant the use of a new construct and a new measure.

We think there are at least three reasons, besides the data, that support its conceptual value. First, job embeddedness captures some theoretical ideas (supported by recent research) that off-the-job and nonaffective factors can influence turnover. Thus, the embeddedness construct reflects some current thinking about retention. It adds coherence (or clarity) to the extensive list of work and nonwork factors that create forces for staying on a job.

Second, thinking about job embeddedness is quite different from thinking about increasing satisfaction or commitment. That is, the levers or factors that researchers, as well as managers, need for managing turnover are conceptually very different. For example, links to organization can be increased by making people mentors and putting them on long-term projects. Links and fit to community can be influenced by providing resources and support for community activities and involvement. On- and off-the-job perks linked to longevity can increase sacrifice issues. Thus, job embeddedness points theory, research, and practice in some new directions.

Third, other approaches (e.g., Lee & Mitchell, 1994) have suggested that many people leave their jobs for reasons other than dissatisfaction (shocks, or specific events, are a key example) and many
people leave without doing a job search. Being less embedded does not push an employee to leave a job as dissatisfaction does (for instance, someone can have a low level of embeddedness but be satisfied with a job). What low levels of embeddedness may do is make employees susceptible to shocks and dissatisfaction—if they occur, it is easier to search and/or leave. Thus, understanding how embeddedness might deflect shocks and diminish job search may increase understanding of turnover.

In summary, we believe that this study makes an important contribution to the organizational attachment literature. It suggests some new and intriguing ways to think about employee retention. Apparently, being embedded in an organization and a community is associated with reduced intent to leave and reduced actual leaving. These findings appear to support the current emphasis in the academic and popular press on the need for organizations to be concerned with employees’ lives both on and off the job. It also suggests that a focus on money and job satisfaction as the levers for retention may be too limited. Many nonfinancial and nonattitudinal factors place people in networks of forces that keep them in their jobs. Further pursuit of these ideas will, we hope, increase understanding of why people stay, why they leave, and how those actions can be influenced.

REFERENCES


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**APPENDIX**

**Results of Factor Analysis of Job Embeddedness Items**

Fit to Community  
\( \alpha' = .78, .79 \)

I really love the place where I live (.77, .74). The weather where I live is suitable for me (.53, .59). This community is a good match for me (.84, .87). I think the community where I live as home (.80, .80). The area where I live offers the leisure activities that I like (.70, .69).

Fit to Organization  
\( \alpha' = .75, .86^b \)

Both organizations: I like the members of my work group (.57, .53). My coworkers are similar to me (.51, .40). My job utilizes my skills and talents well (.72, .80). I feel like I am a good match for this company (.80, .82). I fit with the company’s culture (.72, .72). I like the authority and responsibility I have at this company (.67, .74).

Hospital only: My values are compatible with the organization’s values (.68). I can reach my professional goals working for this organization (.77). I feel good about my professional growth and development (.69).

Links to Community  
\( \alpha' = .77, .50^b \)

Both organizations: Are you currently married? (.93, .93). If you are married, does your spouse work outside the home? (.88, .91). Do you own the home you live in? (.67, .65).

Hospital only: My family roots are in this community (.06). How many family members live nearby? (.07). How many of your close friends live nearby? (.13).

Links to Organization  
\( \alpha' = .65, .62 \)

How long have you been in your present position? (.65, .32). How long have you worked for this company? (.72, .46). How long have you worked in the [grocery/hospital] industry? (.83, .37). How many coworkers do you interact with regularly? (.40, .56). How many coworkers are highly dependent on you? (.42, .57). How many work teams are you on? (.37, .73). How many work committees are you on? (.58, .81).

Community-Related Sacrifice  
\( \alpha' = .61, .59 \)

Leaving this community would be very hard (.78, .83). People respect me a lot in my community (.80, .76). My neighborhood is safe (.68, .85).

Organization-Related Sacrifice  
\( \alpha' = .82, .82 \)

I have a lot of freedom on this job to decide how to pursue my goals (.56, .49). The perks on this job are outstanding (.73, .75). I feel that people at work respect me a great deal (.47, .45). I would sacrifice a lot if I left this job (.56, .56). My promotional opportunities are excellent here (.74, .68). I am well compensated for my level of performance (.62, .59). The benefits are good on this job (.61, .74). The health-care benefits provided by this organization are excellent (.58, .67). The retirement benefits provided by this organization are excellent (.60, .60). The prospects for continuing employment with this company are excellent (.70, .65).

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