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THE INFLUENCE OF JOB SCOPE ON THE PERSONALITY - TURNOVER RELATI--ETC(U)

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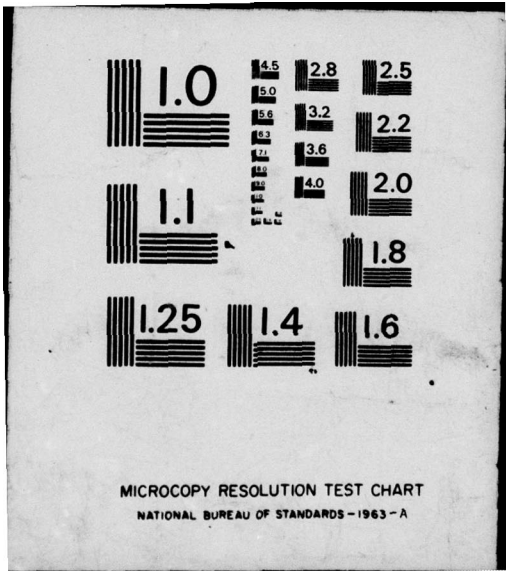
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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER Technical Report, No. 8 ✓	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) The Influence of Job Scope on the Personality - Turnover Relationship.		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED
6. AUTHOR(s) Richard M. Steers Richard T. Mowday, Eugene F. Stone Lyman W. Porter		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER 15
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS Department of Management College of Business Administration University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68508		7. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s) N000 14-76-C-0164 ✓
10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS NR 170-812		11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS Organizational Effectiveness Research Office of Naval Research Arlington, VA 22217
12. REPORT DATE December 1976		13. NUMBER OF PAGES 28
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office) MR-8		14. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report) Unclassified
15. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE 12 31 p.		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report) Distribution of this document is unlimited. Reproduction in whole or in part is permitted for any purpose of the United States Government.		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Turnover need for achievement Job Scope need for affiliation Personality need for autonomy Job Satisfaction		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) This study examined the in- fluence of job scope on the relationship between selected personality charac- teristics of employees and turnover. Individuals employed as machine operators (low scope jobs) and scientific and technical personnel (high scope jobs) were sampled within a large manufacturing organization. No direct relationships were found between personality characteristics and turnover for the combined sample of employees on high and low scope jobs. When correlational analyses were carried out within job scope samples, however, turnover was found to be		

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THE INFLUENCE OF JOB SCOPE ON THE PERSONALITY-TURNOVER RELATIONSHIP

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Technical Report No. 8

December 1976

ACCESSION No.	
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Prepared under ONR Contract N00014-76-C-0164

NR 170-812

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of job scope on the relationship between selected personality characteristics of employees and turnover. Individuals employed as machine operators (low scope jobs) and scientific and technical personnel (high scope jobs) were sampled within a large manufacturing organization. No direct relationships were found between personality characteristics and turnover for the combined sample of employees on high and low scope jobs. When correlational analyses were carried out within job scope samples, however, turnover was found to be negatively related to the need for achievement and positively related to the need for affiliation for employees on high scope jobs. In addition, the need for affiliation was negatively related to turnover for the low job scope sample. When the results for the two samples were compared, the correlations between turnover and the needs for achievement and affiliation found among employees on high and low scope jobs were significantly different. The implications of these findings for organizations and future research on turnover were discussed.

The Influence of Job Scope
on the Personality - Turnover Relationship

Researchers have long been cognizant of the need to consider both characteristics of the individual employee and features of the work environment in attempting to explain behavioral phenomena in organizations. Although Lewin (1951, p. 239) clearly suggested that "the person and his environment must be considered as one constellation of factors" in order to fully understand and predict behavior, research on turnover has generally failed to examine interactions between the individual and environment in relation to the propensity to stay with or leave the organization. Investigations of turnover have most often conceptualized environmental and personal influences as independent sets of predictors. For example, Porter and Steers (1973) reviewed a number of studies in which either job content factors (e.g., task repetitiveness, autonomy, responsibility and role clarity) or personal factors (e.g., age, tenure and personality) have been found to be related to turnover. Only a relatively small number of studies were reviewed, however, which examined the "fit" (i.e., interdependence) between the individual and the job. These studies were limited to investigations of vocational interests in which it has been found that individuals with interests closely corresponding to the characteristics of their job are more likely to remain with the organization (Boyd, 1961; Ferguson, 1958; Mayeske, 1964).

The need to focus research attention on the interdependence between the individual and environment is apparent from the results of studies in

which the relationship between turnover and personality has been examined. Mowday, Stone and Porter (note 1) recently reviewed the results of several such investigations and found mixed results. In addition, they examined the relationship between personality characteristics and turnover in two regional offices of a large insurance company. Although significant multivariate relationships were found between turnover and personality in each office, few consistent relationships between turnover and specific personality traits were found across the two samples. They interpreted the lack of replication as a consequence of environmental differences between the two offices. Depending upon the nature of the job, immediate work environment and larger organization, Mowday et al. (note 1) suggest that a given personality characteristic may or may not be related to turnover. Such a view supports the importance of considering environmental variation in examining the relationships between turnover and personality.

The general failure of turnover research to examine the interdependence between the individual and environment stands in contrast to recent studies in the other areas, particularly job design. Research on the relationship between job scope and employee job satisfaction has examined the potential moderating influence of a variety of personal characteristics of the employee (Brief & Aldag, 1975; Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Hulin & Blood, 1968; Johnson & Stinson, 1975; Stone, 1975, 1976; Stone, Mowday, & Porter, note 2; Wanous, 1974). Although mixed results have been found both within and between studies, support is generally claimed for the moderating effect of higher order need strength on the job scope-job satisfaction relationship.

These results suggest that individuals who desire higher order need satisfaction react more favorably to jobs high in variety, autonomy, task identity and feedback than individuals who do not desire such need satisfaction. In exploring these relationships, however, few investigators have looked beyond the job satisfaction construct to more behavioral measures of employee reactions to the job (e.g., turnover and absenteeism).

The purpose of this study was to extend both the turnover and job design literature by examining the extent to which interactions between employee personality characteristics and the job are related to turnover. Three needs that appear particularly relevant to the job and work setting were examined: (1) achievement; (2) affiliation; and (3) autonomy. Following a line of reasoning similar to that of Litwin and Stringer (1968), it was predicted that individuals with high needs for achievement and autonomy and a low need for affiliation would react more favorably to high scope jobs and thus be more likely to remain with the organization than individuals with opposite needs. High scope jobs provide greater challenge and opportunities for independence and therefore may be more satisfying to individuals with high needs for achievement and autonomy. The increased work demands and independence inherent in such jobs, however, may lessen the opportunities for social interaction and thus prove dissatisfying to employees with a high need for affiliation. Following similar reasoning, it was predicted that employees with low needs for achievement and autonomy and a high need for affiliation would react more favorably and be less likely to turnover on low scope jobs.

In addition to examining a criterion of turnover (as opposed to job satisfaction), this study differs from previous job design research in several respects. First, a carefully developed personality inventory with known reliability

and validity was used to assess the strength of employee needs. Problems associated with the more commonly used measures of higher order need strength suggest such individual differences may be more accurately assessed using standard personality measures (cf., Stone et al., note 2). Second, individuals were sampled from high scope and low scope jobs rather than place primary reliance on a perceptual measure of job characteristics. Schwab and Cummings (1976) have identified several problems associated with the use of such perceptual measures that may confound the relationships under study.

Method

Research Setting

This study was part of a larger investigation designed to examine employee attachments to work organizations. The study was carried out in a large West Coast high technology firm engaged in research and development and the manufacture of a variety of sophisticated electrical and chemical products.

Research Instruments

Personality Characteristics. Form A of Jackson's (1967) Personality Research Form (PRF) was used to measure the strength of employee needs. The PRF was chosen for use based on its rigorous development and sound

psychometric properties (See: Buros, 1972). The development of the PRF is described in detail by Jackson (1967). The design of the scales guards against the common response tendencies of acquiescence and desirability. Jackson (1967) reported good convergent and discriminant validity for each of the scales. In addition, internal consistency for the scales was found to range from .87 to .94 during instrument development. Test-retest reliabilities over a one week period ranged from .77 to .90.

Form A of the PRF measures the strength of 14 needs derived principally from the work of Murray (1938). The needs for achievement, affiliation and autonomy were examined in this study. Jackson (1967) describes individuals with a high need for achievement as aspiring to accomplish difficult tasks, maintaining high work standards and willing to put forth effort to attain excellence. A high need for affiliation suggests that the individual is more concerned with social relationships. Such individuals are described as making efforts to win friendships and maintain close associations with their work colleagues. Individuals with a high need for autonomy are characterized by high self-reliance, independence, self-determination and a dislike for restraints or restrictions.

Each need is measured by 20 items representing statements that an individual may or may not use to describe himself or herself (e.g., "I would like to have a job in which I didn't have to answer to anyone"). Responses are made on a true-false format.

Perceived Job Characteristics. A 13-item instrument developed by Stone (1974) was used to measure employee perceptions of the amounts of variety, autonomy, task identity and feedback associated with their job.

An overall measure of job scope was calculated from a weighted linear combination of the job characteristics. Following Turner and Lawrence (1965), variety and autonomy received double weights in calculating the job scope scores. The measures of job scope and perceived job characteristics were used as a check on the a priori sampling of high and low scope jobs.

Facet Satisfaction. Satisfaction with several facets of the job and work environment were measured using single items developed by Stone (1974). The items had the following general format: "I am very satisfied with the people I work with." Satisfaction was measured with respect to: (1) promotions; (2) pay; (3) co-workers; (4) supervision; and (5) working conditions. Responses were made on a 7 point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Demographic. Study participants provided information concerning their age, level of educational attainment (measured by 12 categories ranging from "6th grade education or less" to "graduate degree"), tenure in the company (measured in months), tenure on current job (measured in months), sex and job title.

Turnover Data. Turnover data were collected from company records approximately eight months following the administration of questionnaires. Only individuals who either remained with the company or voluntarily withdrew from the job were included in the analyses reported in this paper.

Jobs Studied

Two jobs within the organization which appeared to have high and low amounts of job scope were selected for study. The low job scope sample was composed of 64 individuals employed as machine operators on

assembly-line and continuous process production operations. Although the jobs required a certain amount of skill, the nature of the production processes suggested these tasks would be low in terms of the core dimensions of job scope (i.e., variety, autonomy, task identity and feedback). Scientific and technical personnel employed in research and development were selected for the high job scope sample. A total of 45 employees engaged in engineering, technical and scientific research jobs made up the sample. The project-oriented and professional nature of research and development suggested that these jobs would be high in terms of scope.

To verify the selection of machine operators and scientific personnel as low and high scope jobs, the two samples were compared in terms of perceived job characteristics. The means for overall job scope and each of the four job characteristics are presented in Table 1. As predicted, scientific and technical personnel perceived their jobs to be significantly

Insert Table 1 About Here

higher in overall job scope than did machine operators (35.4 vs. 29.0, $p < .01$). An examination of the individual job characteristics measures suggests that the difference in overall job scope was primarily attributable to differences in the perceived amounts of variety and autonomy associated with the jobs. Differences with respect to task identity and feedback failed to reach significance, although they were in the predicted direction.

The two samples were also compared in terms of demographic characteristics and facet satisfaction. These means are reported in Table 1. No

differences were found in terms of age, sex, tenure in the company or tenure in current job. As might be expected, however, a significant difference was found between the two samples in terms of educational attainment. The average level of education for machine operators was a high school degree. In contrast, 82% of the scientific and technical personnel held undergraduate or graduate college degrees. Comparisons between the samples in terms of facet satisfaction are discussed later in the paper.

The turnover rates for the two job samples were 9% for machine operators (N = 6) and 13% for the scientific and technical personnel (N = 6).

Data Collection Procedures

Questionnaires were administered to groups of study participants by the researchers on company premises. Since the time required to complete the entire questionnaire battery was estimated to be 2 hours, each respondent completed half the questionnaires on one day and the remaining questions on the following day. The PRF was administered separately in one of the two sessions. Respondents were randomly assigned to complete either the PRF or other questionnaires during the first administration session. Participants were asked not to discuss the questionnaires among themselves until all of the administrations had been completed.

Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis. Participants were given information about the general purpose of the study (i.e., "to learn more concerning how people feel about their job"). In addition, they were told that individual questionnaire responses would be held in

the strictest confidence.

Data Analysis Procedures

To examine the influence of job scope on the relationship between personality characteristics and turnover, subgroup correlational analyses were performed. Given the categorical nature of the job scope "measure", it was considered most appropriate to correlate personality characteristics with turnover within each of the job scope samples (Saunders, 1956; Zedeck, 1971). In these correlational analyses, staying with the organization was coded 0.0 and leaving was coded 1.0. Thus, a positive correlation between personality and turnover indicates that individuals high on the given personality characteristic were more likely to leave the organization.

Results

The zero order correlations between the measures of personality, job scope and turnover are presented in Table 2. The correlations suggest that the measures used in the study were relatively independent. Although significant correlations were found between several of the need strength

Insert Table 2 About Here

measures and between the need for achievement and job scope, the size of the correlations indicate that the proportion of shared variance was not large.

The relatively small correlations found between turnover and the

needs for achievement, affiliation and autonomy are of particular interest in Table 2. For the combined sample of employees on high and low scope jobs, no significant relationships were found between the personality traits of employees and their propensity to leave the organization.

To determine the influence of job scope on the personality-turnover relationship, correlations between turnover and each of the personality measures were calculated separately for the high and low job scope samples. Since the samples were found to differ in terms of their level of educational attainment, partial correlations holding education constant were computed between turnover and the personality measures. These partial correlations are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 About Here

As the results indicate, for the high job scope sample significant relationships were found between turnover and the needs for achievement ($r = -.44, p < .01$) and affiliation ($r = .32, p < .05$). The correlation between turnover and the need for autonomy among employees on high scope jobs approached significance ($r = .20, p = .11$) although opposite from the direction predicted. For the low job scope sample, a significant negative relationship was found between turnover and the need for affiliation ($r = -.27, p < .05$). No relationships were found between turnover and the remaining measures among employees on low scope jobs.

When the correlations for the low and high job scope samples were

compared, it was evident that the characteristics of the job influenced the relationship between personality and turnover. Significant differences were found between the correlations for the high and low job scope samples on the needs for achievement ($z = 2.31, p < .01$) and affiliation ($z = 3.07, p < .01$). No difference was found, however, for the autonomy variable.

Discussion

The overall results of this study are consistent with previous research on job design in which the interaction between the individual and the job design has been found to be an important determinant of employee job satisfaction. In addition, these results provide an explanation for the mixed results which have been found when personality characteristics are directly correlated with turnover. The extent to which a given personality characteristic influences the turnover decision appears to be at least in part dependent on the nature of the job. In other words, personality traits may or may not be related to turnover depending upon features of the job, immediate work environment and larger organization. Where there is a good "fit" between the individual and the environment employees are more likely to remain with the organization. Where there is a bad "fit", however, the likelihood of turnover may increase.

The relationships found in this study can be more clearly seen in the graphs presented in Figures 1 and 2. In these figures the mean standardized need for achievement (Figure 1) and need for affiliation (Figure 2) are shown for stayers and leavers on high and low scope jobs. In calculating the means, the level of educational attainment was partialled from the

need strength scores. For employees on high scope jobs, turnover was found to be negatively related to the need for achievement. The need for affiliation was found to be positively related to turnover for employees on high

Insert Figures 1 and 2 About Here

scope jobs and negatively related to turnover for the low scope job sample. These results are consistent with the view that high scope jobs are more likely to provide the challenge, personal responsibility and feedback desired by individuals with a high need for achievement (cf., Litwin & Stringer, 1968). As a consequence, such individuals are more likely to remain on jobs characterized by high amounts of variety, autonomy, task identity and feedback. On the other hand, the increased work demands and independence characteristics of high scope jobs may not provide an environment in which employees with a high need for affiliation can satisfy their social needs. The opportunities to satisfy social needs appear to be greater on low scope jobs. As a consequence, for employees with a high need for affiliation the likelihood of leaving the organization appears to increase on high scope jobs and decrease on jobs lower in scope.

In contrast to what would be predicted on theoretical grounds, need for achievement was found to be unrelated to turnover for employees on low scope jobs. In addition, no relationships were found between turnover and the need for autonomy for employees in either sample. Several factors that may have influenced these relationships were examined in an effort to better understand the results. An examination of the turnover rate and

distribution of scores on the needs for achievement and autonomy indicated the low relationships were not attributable to a restriction of range on any of the measures. Covariation between the personality measures and education was examined to determine whether partialing the level of educational attainment may have affected the range of personality scores. The need for achievement was unrelated to education ($r = .09$) and thus covariation between these measures does not appear to have influenced the need for achievement-turnover relationship when education was held constant. The need for autonomy, however, was significantly related to education ($r = .20, p < .05$) and such covariation may have had a slight influence on the analyses.

Research on interactions between need strengths and organizational climate by Litwin and Stringer (1968) suggests one explanation for the low relationship between turnover and the need for achievement for employees on low scope jobs. They found that the nature of the situation was an important determinant of the extent to which various need strengths are aroused. For example, their research suggests that jobs which are low in challenge, feedback and opportunities for personal responsibility are less likely to arouse a high need for achievement. In such work situations, the need for achievement may remain more or less dormant and thus not influence the turnover decision.

Litwin and Stringer's (1968) findings suggest that employees with a high need for achievement develop coping strategies that result in the lack of environmental stimulation (e.g., low challenge) having little influence on their evaluation of the job in terms of the turnover decision. Employees

with a high need for achievement may, for example, cope with low scope jobs by seeking satisfaction of their needs in nonwork segments of their life. For such individuals, the need for achievement may remain unaroused in the work situation. It is not clear, however, whether this represents a long-term coping strategy or merely allows high need for achievement employees to work on low scope jobs until more attractive opportunities become available. It is interesting to note that similar coping strategies may not be available in the opposite work situation where low need achievers are placed on high scope jobs. High scope jobs are likely to be perceived as overly challenging and demanding by employees with a low need for achievement. In this situation, turnover may represent the only effective method of resolving the conflict between the needs of the individual and demands of the work environment.

In interpreting the results of this study, it is important to recognize that the jobs studied may have differed on a number of relevant dimensions in addition to the characteristics of the task. For example, high and low scope jobs may differ in terms of compensation practices, opportunities for promotion, supervisory style and working conditions. Although no direct measures of these other environmental influences were available in this study, employee satisfaction with various facets of the job provides one indirect method of assessing whether such differences influence the relationships under investigation in this study. When high and low job scope samples were compared in terms of facet satisfaction (Table 1), no significant differences were found with respect to satisfaction with pay, promotions, supervision and co-workers. The two samples did significantly differ, however, in their

reported level of satisfaction with working conditions. Such a difference is not surprising since research and development activities are generally carried out in more pleasant work surroundings than is the case with assembly-line and continuous process operations. Satisfaction with working conditions was not related to turnover ($r = .08$), however, and this difference between job scope samples therefore may not have seriously confounded the results.

The overall results of this study support the view that interdependencies between employees and the work environment are an important consideration with respect to the turnover decision. For organizations, the results suggest that increased attention to the "fit" between the employee and the job may provide one method through which turnover can be reduced. In addition to organizational benefits in the form of reduced turnover, closer correspondence between the needs of employees and the demands of the work environment may also result in generally more satisfying work experiences for employees. Before such an organizational strategy can be carried out, it is evident that more research is needed to explore the nature of individual-environmental interactions as they influence the turnover process. In addition to the selected personality and job content factors examined in this investigation, future research attention should be directed toward other relevant individual difference and environmental influences. Such research may result in an increased understanding of the complex processes through which individuals decide whether to stay with or leave the organization.

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Footnotes

This study was supported by funds supplied by the Office of Naval Research, Contracts N00014-69-A-0200-9001 NR 151-315 and N00014-76-C-0164 NR 170-812.

The assistance of Les Berkes, Terry Cobb, George Merker and Bill Snavelly at various stages of the investigation was greatly appreciated.

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Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Job Scope, Job Characteristics,
Demographic and Facet Satisfaction Measures

Measures	Low Scope Jobs	High Scope Jobs
Overall Job Scope	29.0 (5.4)	35.4** (4.7)
Job Characteristics		
Variety	3.2 (.9)	4.6** (1.2)
Autonomy	5.8 (1.6)	7.3** (1.1)
Task Identity	4.7 (2.8)	5.4 (2.2)
Feedback	6.1 (1.4)	6.2 (1.3)
Demographic		
Age	33.1 (9.9)	36.2 (9.1)
Sex (percent male)	.97 (.2)	.91 (.3)
Tenure in Current Job	37.6 (45.4)	45.6 (71.5)
Tenure in Company	44.7 (49.4)	53.1 (54.7)
Education	7.4 (1.8)	11.0** (1.5)
Facet Satisfaction		
Satisfaction with Pay	3.7 (2.1)	4.0 (2.1)
Satisfaction with Promotions	3.9 (2.1)	4.2 (2.2)

Measures	Low Scope Jobs	High Scope Jobs
Satisfaction with Co-workers	5.4 (1.7)	5.8 (4.7)
Satisfaction with Supervision	4.5 (2.2)	4.9 (2.1)
Satisfaction with Working Conditions	3.6 (2.3)	5.5** (1.8)
Sample Sizes	64	45

Note. One-tail t-tests were used to compare job scope and job characteristics means. Two-tailed tests were used in all other comparisons.

**p < .01

Table 2
Correlations Among Measures
for Combined Samples

	Achievement	Affiliation	Autonomy	Job Scope ^a	Turnover
Achievement	--	-.01	-.21*	.26**	.15
Affiliation		--	-.28**	-.02	-.00
Autonomy			--	.01	-.15
Job Scope				--	.02 ^b
Turnover					--

^aHigh scope jobs coded 1.0 and low scope jobs coded 0.0.

^bPhi coefficient

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Table 3
 Partial Correlations Between Turnover and Personality
 for High and Low Scope Job Samples
 Holding Level of Educational Attainment Constant

Need Strengths	Low Scope Jobs	High Scope Jobs
Achievement	-.01	-.44** ^a
Affiliation	-.27*	.32* ^a
Autonomy	.12	.20

^aDifference between correlations significant at $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Mean need for achievement for stayers and leavers on low scope jobs and high scope jobs.

Figure 2. Mean need for affiliation for stayers and leavers on low scope jobs and high scope jobs.

