

## **Sales Force Turnover and Retention: A Research Agenda**

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### **Abstract:**

Identifying, acquiring, and retaining top sales talent remains a priority in many sales organizations because salesperson turnover remains such an intractable management problem. This paper seeks to encourage and enrich continued research on sales turnover by introducing recent methodological and theoretical advances in psychological, economic, and organizational theory. First, we suggest an examination of sales turnover guided by social network theory. Second, we propose the *simultaneous* consideration of the interplay between variables within a comprehensive, integrated multilevel framework. Third, in keeping with the shift in research designs initiated in management, our model includes the concept of “shocks”—jarring events that could drive turnover decisions. Finally, we propose to examine sales turnover within an international context. The conceptual framework we present outlines how sales organizations might effectively address sales force turnover and, as a consequence, improve productivity. We conclude by suggesting some specific research questions intended to provide direction for researchers interested in identifying and investigating underresearched linkages.

**Keywords:** turnover | employee retention | salespeople

### **Article:**

Turnover is a problem with enormous scope and ramifications in many organizations (Cascio 2006). Direct costs associated with hiring and training a new employee have been estimated to be 200 percent of salary (Griffeth and Hom 2001). Such costs can be particularly significant for the sales profession where turnover has been estimated to be double the rate of other career settings (Richardson 1999). For example, the turnover rate for insurance salespeople during their first year of employment is reported to be as high as 50 percent (Landau and Werbel 1995).

While the direct costs of turnover can be substantial, indirect costs may be even greater. For example, when salespeople leave an organization, the customer relationships they formed and

developed may be at risk, exposing their companies to a potential reduction in revenue and subsequent profitability. There are also indirect costs associated with turnover contained within the “ramp-up” time new salespeople need to establish themselves in their territories and generate acceptable levels of revenue (DeConinck and Johnson 2009). In addition, sales organizations paying inadequate attention to deficient retention rates become susceptible to a phenomenon, identified by Dudley and Goodson as the “low sales recruiting ceiling syndrome” (1988, p. 794). Sales organizations characterized by persistently poor retention rates become known to prospective high-level sales recruits via informal social networks. This effectively removes them from the application pool, which in turn imposes a persistent but artificially low talent ceiling on the sales candidates accessible to recruiters representing those organizations.

Not surprisingly, turnover in general has been the topic of a large body of research and continues to be studied within and across time and business settings using a variety of conceptual models for the turnover process (e.g., Arndt, Arnold, and Landry 2006; Chang, Rosen, and Levy 2009; Hom and Griffeth 1991; Lucas et al. 1987). To synthesize results, a number of meta-analyses have been undertaken, primarily in the organizational research literature (e.g., Bauer et al. 2007; Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner 2000; Holtom et al. 2008).

Predictably, sales researchers have also focused attention on the topic of turnover (e.g., Brashear et al. 2003; Jaramillo et al. 2009; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, and Taylor 2007), where it is a particularly important issue to sales management due to the nature of the job, its historically high levels of turnover, as well as its cost to the selling organization (Richardson 1999) and because sales positions are among the most difficult positions to fill (Rivera 2007). Thus, it is not unexpected that sales force turnover and retention research has been identified as a research priority (Darmon 2008).

**Table 1.** Types of Turnover

	<b>Voluntary</b>	<b>Involuntary</b>
Controllable	Functional <hr style="border: none; border-top: 1px solid black;"/> Dysfunctional	Functional <hr style="border: none; border-top: 1px solid black;"/> Dysfunctional
Uncontrollable	Functional <hr style="border: none; border-top: 1px solid black;"/> Dysfunctional	Functional <hr style="border: none; border-top: 1px solid black;"/> Dysfunctional

*Note:* The variable “controllable” versus “uncontrollable” may be difficult to measure as a controlled variable may become uncontrollable with time. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this comment.

A large proportion of turnover research focuses on the topic in general terms, though some literature suggests the need to differentiate between various types of turnover. These include functional and dysfunctional variants of turnover (see Table 1) (Allen, Bryant, and Vardaman 2010; Johnston et al. 1988), controllable and uncontrollable turnover, as well as voluntary and involuntary turnover (Darmon 2008). Functional turnover occurs when an unproductive or disruptive salesperson leaves. Dysfunctional turnover occurs when valued employees quit that a firm would like to retain. An example of dysfunctional turnover specific to the sales setting includes the quit while succeeding syndrome reported by Dudley and Goodson (1988, 2007). They found that a considerable number of established salespeople leave unexpectedly while

producing at high levels. Some individual cases of functional and dysfunctional turnover may be controllable if management or the organization make changes to ensure employee satisfaction (in the case of dysfunctional turnover) or attempt to help enhance employee performance (in the case of functional turnover). However, managers and researchers also need to consider the distinction between voluntary and involuntary turnover and note how different factors may affect those turnover decisions differentially.

While the turnover literature in general has become fairly well developed over the past three decades, there is still much to be learned, and research on sales turnover in particular could benefit by considering some of the recent methodological and theoretical advances in psychological, economic, and organizational theory. On the basis of earlier reviews of turnover research in management (e.g., Holtom et al. 2008), we identify four important trends. First, using social network theory, Mossholder, Settoon, and Henagan (2005) reported important relationally oriented insights associated with voluntary turnover among nonsales employees. Guided by this perspective, we are voicing a similar “network” argument that sales turnover can be explained by the specificities of multiple internal and external relationships salespeople are managing.

Second, previous sales research has tended to exclusively focus on one or at most two levels of analysis. Holtom et al. (2008) reached a similar conclusion regarding the management literature and suggested the need for more research that incorporates individual, group, and organizational factors and analyzes their influences simultaneously.

To that end, our paper presents a multilevel reconceptualization of turnover precursors. Indeed, to gain more insight into the turnover issues faced by firms, we propose *simultaneous* evaluations of the interplay of candidate variables within a comprehensive, integrated, multilevel framework. Third, in keeping with the shift in research design initiated by Lee and Mitchell (1994) in management, our model also includes “shocks,” or jarring events, that can precipitate turnover decisions. Finally, the model developed applies to sales force turnover issues internationally as opposed to the typical research context that focuses on a single firm or national sales force.

The conceptual framework we propose outlines how sales organizations might effectively approach sales force turnover and, consequently, improve performance. In the remainder of the paper, we identify certain foundational variables and their possible interrelationships and then add higher-order variables and relationships that can also influence a salesperson’s turnover decisions. We conclude by proposing some specific research questions that might encourage further identification and investigation of underresearched linkages.

## **EVOLUTION OF TURNOVER RESEARCH**

March and Simon (1958) are generally credited with the first attempt to develop an overall theory to explain why people leave their jobs. According to March and Simon’s theory, two factors determine whether an employee will leave an organization: (1) the perceived desirability of leaving the employing organization (theorized as organizational commitment and job satisfaction) and (2) the ease of departing (theorized as the quality of alternative job opportunities). Along these same lines, Mobley (1977) identified sequential and intermediary

variables that lead from job dissatisfaction to quitting a job. Adding to this model, Price and Mueller (1986) cataloged the antecedents of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. These included social integration, pay, formal communication, instrumental communication, centralization, routinization, role overload, promotional opportunity, general training, professionalism, coworker support, supervisor support, and distributive justice.

While significant progress has been made in better understanding why individuals leave a job, even the most inclusive models continue to leave much unexplained variance (Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner 2000; Maertz and Campion 1998; Price and Mueller 1986). Subsequently, scholars have called for further conceptual research to better understand employee turnover (Kammeyer-Mueller et al. 2005; Maertz and Campion 1998; Mitchell and Lee 2001; Mossholder, Settoon, and Henagan 2005). Responding to this call, Felps et al. (2009) developed and tested a social contagion model of turnover where the job embeddedness and job-seeking behaviors of coworkers influence employees' decisions to quit. They reported that coworkers' job embeddedness and job search behaviors play critical roles in explaining why people leave their jobs.

The framework presented in our paper is an additional attempt to expand previous turnover research. As earlier noted, Price and Mueller (1986) cataloged the antecedents of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. While we are also including antecedents of job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the current model, it is important to recognize our primary intent and contribution is to present a multilevel reconceptualization of the antecedents of turnover specific to the sales setting.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In response to increasing global competition, accelerating technological progress, expanding levels of knowledge-based activities, and escalating customer demands, many firms are motivated to improve their ability to retain their talent base. To do so, they can draw from a body of general research on employee turnover and retention that reflects not only conventional intrapsychic, personalistic considerations (i.e., psychological microvariables associated with the individual),<sup>1</sup> and organizational and economic theories (i.e., macrovariables associated with situational contexts), but also mesolevel theoretical frameworks (i.e., microstudies in macrocontexts) (Felps et al. 2009). Although sales research tends to borrow liberally from management research on employee retention and turnover, recent theoretical advancements have not been applied specifically to the sales *context* as previously noted (for recent reviews of the management literature on turnover, see Holtom et al. 2008; Maertz and Campion 1998). Consequently, sales researchers need to reflect in their investigations the general evolution of the turnover concept and methods applied to its study with a view to advancing our particular knowledge of the processes behind sales force retention and turnover. To this end, we propose a relational, nested, contingent, and intercultural model of salesperson turnover as shown in Figure 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Personalistic" was the name given to a now defunct school of psychological thought originated by German psychologist Edward Spranger (1882–1963). The personalistic school of psychology argued that the formal study of personality should occupy the center of psychological science (VandenBos 2007, p. 689).

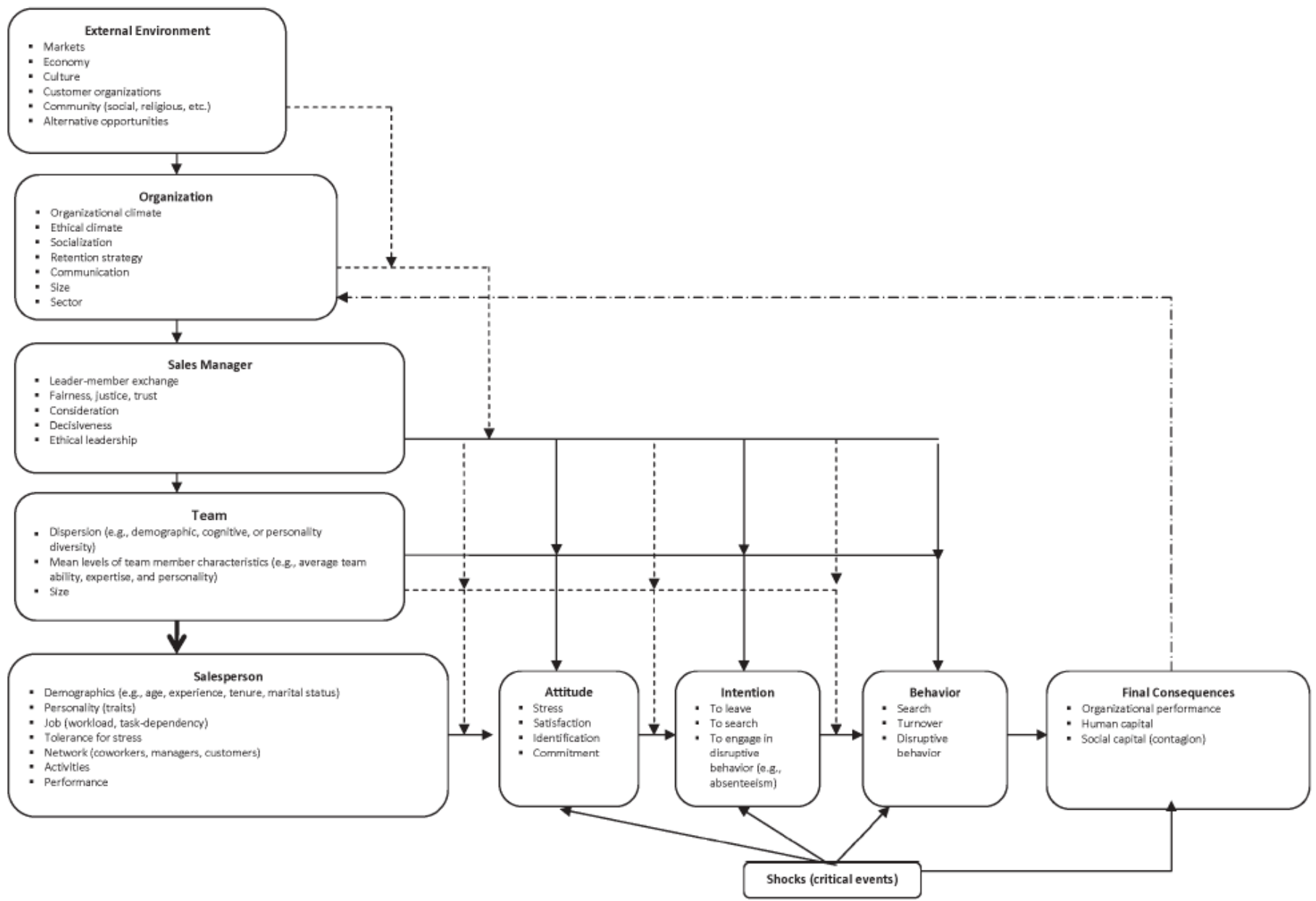


Figure 1. Conceptual model

Our conceptual model (Figure 1) postulates a chain of antecedent conditions preceding actual salesperson turnover and its subsequent effect on organizational performance. The research design includes five levels of analysis: salesperson, team, sales manager, organization, and external environment.

In our model, individual salespeople (Level 1) are nested within teams (Level 2), sales managers (Level 3) in turn are nested within organizations (Level 4). Finally, organizations are nested within the external environment (Level 5). In Level 1, cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics of the individual salesperson such as constitutional makeup, demographics, personality traits, workload, stress/frustration tolerance, and social network composition can all shape the attitudinal processes involved in work role integration, psychological equilibrium, job satisfaction, social and self-identification, and commitment. Attitudes that result from these states, traits, and processes then activate a salesperson's decisional posture relative to the behavioral options present. In this context, ideation about staying (linked to positive attitude associated with approach behaviors) or quitting (associated with negative attitude linked to withdrawal behaviors) occurs. A negative attitude could induce a salesperson to consider initiating a search for alternative job opportunities, where "search" refers to the constellation of activities involved in identifying, exploring, and evaluating options. It is also possible for attitude to magnify or attenuate the likelihood of malevolent dispositions that can provoke disruptive behaviors such as acts of sabotage, uncooperative and disloyal behaviors, and absenteeism. Behaviors (e.g., stay, search, quit) occur when the attitudes underlying them are strong. However, it is one thing for intentions to remain internalized (positive or negative); quite another to act them out. We accommodate this possibility in our model: An attitude and the threshold regulating cognitions governing behavioral expression may depend on the presence of ancillary variables, including alternative job opportunities and shocks (usually, but not always, negative) within or outside the organization. A shock can trigger the psychological process of quitting preceding actual separation ("psychological attrition" or new mind set of salespeople today featuring expectations that any firm may fire them regardless of their performance),<sup>2</sup> and as such, may be an important variable for understanding and managing turnover. Shocks can be unexpected (e.g., poor treatment from a supervisor) or expected (e.g., achieving a desired professional certification); non-job related (e.g., spouse offered a job in another city) or job related (e.g., being assigned numerous accounts from another territory); and negative (e.g., receiving a poor performance evaluation) or positive (receiving a major job offer from another organization) (Mitchell et al. 2001). Finally, the impact of retaining or losing a salesperson can be positive (functional) or negative (dysfunctional) depending on whether the separation moves the organization closer to or further away from performance, social capital, and human capital objectives (Figure 1).

In Level 2, the impact of sales teams is taken into consideration. As Bradford et al. (2010) explain, firms are using sales teams to manage customer relationships and consequently develop cross-level and cross-functional ties with customers. Since team members typically belong to different horizons, an important research literature has emerged in management about team composition. This literature neatly divides into two streams: (1) the dispersion perspective (e.g., demographic, cognitive, or personality diversity) and (2) the mean levels of team member characteristics approach (e.g., average team ability, expertise, or personality) (Stewart 2006).

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<sup>2</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this comment.

Given that salespeople are nested within sales teams, we expect that their composition will have an effect on salespeople's decision process.

In Level 3, we consider the influence of sales managers on the foregoing constructs and relationships. Variables considered at this level include the quality of leader–member exchange, leader fairness, justice, trust and consideration, leader decisiveness, and ethical leadership. A recent Gallup poll seemed to support the maxim that employees leave managers not organizations (Robison 2008). In the poll, the most frequently cited reason for quitting is dissatisfaction with or inability to get along with direct supervisors or managers. Managers create the microclimate under which their subordinates enter the culture and work. This climate in part reflects the level of fairness, justice, trust, and consideration accorded subordinates by their managers. Also, the decisiveness of managers, their leadership style, and the extent to which they exhibit ethical leadership may influence the quality of the leader–member exchange and hence positive perceptions of the work environment. It is therefore likely that sales managers contribute both directly and indirectly to how salespeople feel about their job and how they behave while on the job.

Given that salespeople are nested within sales managers, manager-driven attitudes, intentions, and behaviors can be expected to vary considerably across sales teams. Consequently, the variables and the relationships described in Level 1 may modify depending on the manager to whom a salesperson reports. For example, a salesperson experiencing a high stress level may consider quitting. But he or she may decide to stay if the quality of the leader–member exchange is also high and if doubts exist about the supportiveness of the leadership in an alternative job. Similarly, the climate created by a leader may heighten or dampen the influence of attitude as a driver supporting the intention of a salesperson to quit, or the relationship between the intention to search for alternative employment and the initiation of actual search behavior.

In Level 4, we acknowledge that sales managers must work within the limits of the structure, systems, procedures, and practices as defined and sanctioned by their organizations. Organizational variables on this level shape the culture and create the climate that forms the relationships and expectations between sales managers and salespeople. Not only do the variables considered at this level (i.e., organizational climate, ethical climate, socialization processes, retention strategies, and communication practices) influence management behavior (leader–member exchange, fairness, justice, trust, consideration, decisiveness, and ethics) toward their salespeople, but they also moderate the links between managers' actions and their salespeople's attitudes, intentions, and behaviors.

Finally, in Level 5, we reflect the understanding that organizations respond to opportunities and challenges in their external environments by implementing strategies to move them closer to their performance objectives. Specifically, economic and market forces shaping competitive scenarios present both opportunities and threats that influence organizational reactions. Further, parameters associated with specific national cultures and local communities in which organizations operate also shape attitudes, expectations, and actions. It is thus expected that external environmental conditions will influence the organizational variables considered in Level 3, the relationship between these (i.e., Level 3 variables) and sales managers' influences.

## The Embedded Sales Force

Just as the concept of sales force embeddedness was relevant in the 1980s, evolutionary changes in the salesperson's role continue to make this a timely research topic. Salespeople working in business-to-business settings are now referred to as "customer relationship managers," and as such, are embedded in both the buying and selling organizations (Bradford et al. 2010). Accordingly, they now need to manage multiple intra- and intergroup social relationships. To perform effectively, they are required to establish and maintain working relationships not only with members of their own sales teams to coordinate sales activities but also with members of other functions within their own organizations such as marketing, research and development, and logistics so they can ensure the best possible solutions for their customers.

Moreover, salespeople aspiring to professional advancement must maintain personal career-management relationships with their supervisor and other personnel within the organization to promote their own career-related interests, clarify and define their sales role, and develop a network of supportive colleagues. Within their customer-organizations, salespeople are expected to effectively manage relationships across levels (e.g., management, buying centers, end users) to fully capture customers' needs, understand their decision-making process, and creatively develop customized solutions. The complexity of the role of modern salespeople is further elevated because they are also embedded within even broader economic and cultural (societal) environments as illustrated in Figure 1. Conceptually, embeddedness has two important implications for research: one based on social networks theory (e.g., Burt 2007) and the other on the utilization of multilevel investigational strategies (e.g., Raudenbush and Bryk 2001).

## The Relational Perspective

Social networks theory has shown considerable promise in the management literature in explaining employee turnover (Holtom et al. 2008). Mitchell et al. (2001), for example, reported that job embeddedness is a predictor of turnover. Mossholder, Settoon, and Henagan (2005) provide additional support for this perspective. They reported that embeddedness, along with strong relational ties as reflected by high network centrality, relate inversely to turnover. The social network perspective appears particularly relevant to the study of salespeople because salespeople are boundary spanners. Unlike most employee groups, they have to simultaneously maintain and manage several job-related ties outside their organizations, particularly in customer organizations. Predictably, therefore, salespeople's embeddedness within their firms and customer organizations may have a potent influence on a salesperson's decision to stay or leave. These observations naturally lead to several questions about the embeddedness-turnover phenomenon. What are the typical network patterns characterizing salespeople's intentions to quit? Do those networks evolve over time? Beyond the structural aspects of networks traditionally included in the study of turnover (e.g., density and centrality), future research efforts involving salespeople should also focus on the role of external (e.g., salesperson-customer) and internal (e.g., salesperson-coworkers) ties in the turnover process with a view to understanding the relative importance of these ties in turnover decisions (Holtom et al. 2008).

In summary, the key dimensions of salesperson embeddedness are relational links or connections salespeople establish and maintain with people inside the organization (e.g., boss and colleagues)



and outside the organization (e.g., customers and other members of the community) modified by the concepts of fit. Fit describes how well salespeople assimilate into the organization and the broader community. In addition, these relational linkages include prospective sacrifice—what a salesperson stands to lose upon quitting. For researchers, this suggests the following research question:

*RQ1: What is the relative influence of embeddedness (the links, fit, and sacrifice) on the turnover of salespeople?*

Empirical testing of the issues raised by this question implies measurement of network data. Ego-network techniques (Wasserman and Faust 1994) have gained widespread acceptance in the management literature; however, they represent relatively new tools to marketing researchers. Moreover, measurement of relational and structural embeddedness is usually conducted across a limited number of firms/business units, far from the random samples traditionally chosen to test conceptual models in marketing.

### A Multilevel Perspective

Individual-level constructs have been the primary focus of the research on salesperson turnover (e.g., Boles, Johnston, and Hair 1997; Fournier et al. 2010; Jaramillo et al. 2009; Lewin and Sager 2010). Few sales force turnover studies employed multilevel models equipped to consider the simultaneous interplay of organizational-, managerial-, and individual-level variables. But, higher-level organizational constructs (e.g., organizational politics, employment or compensation models, as well as decisions regarding training levels and sales force budgets) have also been related to salesperson turnover (e.g., Brashear et al. 2006; Johnston et al. 1990; Treadway et al. 2004). Further, the impact of sales management decisions (e.g., level of control and supervisory support) on salesperson turnover has also been investigated in some studies (e.g., Brashear, Manolis, and Brooks 2005; DeConinck and Johnson 2009).

Considered jointly, interesting interaction effects between variables measured at and across various levels may be found to play a significant role in explaining the turnover of salespeople. For example, do poor salesperson–supervisor relationships engender stronger quitting intention among salespeople on fixed salary than that found among salespeople on variable compensation? Turnover models utilizing a multilevel perspective have already been tested for nonsales employees (e.g., Felps et al. 2009; Kammeyer-Mueller et al. 2005; Sacco and Schmitt 2005). In the sales force context, we expect intra- and intergroup relationships will (1) influence salespeople’s attitudes and intentions regarding leaving and their subsequent decision to leave or remain and (2) moderate the relationships between individual characteristics and attitudes. In line with Holtom et al. (2008), we contend that research on retention and turnover should incorporate individual, team, managerial, organizational, and environmental factors in order to account for their *simultaneous* impact. This leads to the next research question:

*RQ2: What influences do team, managerial, organizational, and environmental variables have on the relationship between the personalistic variables of salespeople and the turnover process?*

Empirical testing of the proposed multilevel model (Figure 1) presents four major challenges. First, data have to be collected from multiple sources spanning all four levels. Second, questionnaires need to be constructed and coded to ensure accurate matching of salespeople to sales managers, sales managers to organizations, and organizations to external environments. Third, hypothesis testing requires the use of hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) procedures due to the multilevel nature of the data (Raudenbush and Bryk 2001). HLM uses iterative maximum likelihood estimation to simultaneously estimate the relationships among variables at several levels. Fourth, our model contains some temporal aspects whose empirical validity will require longitudinal data. For example, the intention–behavior–final consequence path is time based and cannot be adequately tested with cross-sectional data.

### *A Multipath Perspective*

Reviewing the literature on employee turnover, Lee et al. (2008) noticed that the conventional dissatisfaction–search–turnover path does not capture the full spectrum of paths followed by leavers, who, for example, frequently reconsider their employment situation after encountering a shock. The unfolding model proposed by Lee and Mitchell (1994) was the first to supplement the traditional, linear view of turnover decision, with new distinct decisional paths employees may follow depending on the nature of shock events (e.g., pregnancy, job offer, promotion, firm merger) experienced. They also demonstrated how such shocks can drive employee turnover events through five different paths. In their model, each path contains shocks (i.e., [un]expected events triggering a reassessment of the situation), contingent scripts (i.e., plan for leaving), image violations (i.e., incompatibility of an employee’s values, goals, or strategies and those of the employing organization), job satisfaction (i.e., lower levels generated by the employment situation), and job search options unfolding over time (i.e., identification and evaluation of alternatives).

These new developments prompt researchable questions about the shocks–turnover association. For example, shocks may be specific to selling task specifics: increasing difficulty understanding customer needs or low satisfaction with customer types. To our knowledge, no sales research has used this approach to shed light on salesperson turnover. It would be interesting and informative to see how shocks (especially those related to customer organizations) might drive the turnover process of salespeople. Consequently, we propose the following research questions:

*RQ3: What shocks might affect salesperson retention and turnover, and how do these shocks shape the process that leads to a stay or quit decision?*

Testing the impact of shocks on turnover decisions presents new challenges for marketing researchers. For example, longitudinal data, which are difficult to collect, have to be used to ensure accurate assessment of the influences occurring from the shock event. In the same vein, researchers need to rely on statistical techniques such as survival analysis in order to depict career paths where salespeople “survive” with an employer prior to quitting (e.g., Moncrief, Hoverstad, and Lucas 1989).

### *Assessing the Role of Culture on Salesperson Turnover*

Richards, Moncrief, and Marshall (2010) note in their review of selling and sales management research that the discipline has now become truly global, but most of the turnover research has been conducted in the United States. A notable exception is the Fournier et al. (2010) study of salespeople turnover in France. However, this study did not examine the role of cultural variables. Investigations incorporating cultural variables should be of interest because earlier work in management has raised concern about the inappropriateness of U.S.-based turnover models for other cultures (for a review, see Holtom et al. 2008).

Consistent with Tsui, Nifadkar, and Ou (2007), we propose the inclusion of two modes of cultural influence on salesperson turnover: direct and moderating influences. We envisage scenarios in which specific dimensions of culture affect the salespeople, sales managers, and company factors described in Levels 1, 2, and 3 of Figure 1. Therefore, extensions of recent models involving the moderating effect of cultural performance orientation (e.g., Onyemah, Rouziès, and Panagopoulos 2010) or the direct effect of regional culture (e.g., Rouziès, Segalla, and Weitz 2003; Segalla et al. 2006) could be proposed. In addition, cultural variables may also affect the assessment of alternative opportunities and shocks. For example, sociolegal constraints could explain differences in the appeal of various job opportunities. Thus, we propose the following research question:

*RQ4: What direct and moderating roles do specific dimensions of culture play in the sales turnover process?*

Needless to say that data collection for research studies involving culture raises other issues such as cross-national invariance of measurement instruments or statistical analysis of multilevel data (e.g., potentially individual and country level data).

## **CONCLUSION**

In this paper, we outlined some of the research foundational to the study of employee turnover in general and, where possible, sales in particular. Estimates of the direct and indirect consequences of undesirable turnover were described, and some of the precursors to turnover reported in the research literature were presented. Our review progressed to more contemporary insights and identified some of the special issues associated with the study of salesperson turnover that are not necessarily involved in turnover studies in general, nonsales settings.

Promising theoretical and methodological advances across the behavioral sciences have initiated renewed opportunities for turnover research. We proposed a comprehensive reconceptualization of the constellation of variables hypothesized to influence the turnover process. The result is a sequence of hypothesized antecedents thought to precede turnover. For empirical testing, our model nests levels within levels. Salesperson characteristics (Level 1) are influenced by the team environment in which they work (Level 2). The team is in turn nested within the sales manager (Level 3). The sales manager level is in turn nested within the context of the organization (Level 4), which imposes influences on the sales manager. Finally, the salesperson who is nested within the sphere of sales manager influence, which is nested within the influence of the organization's influence, are all subject to influence by sociolegal, economic, political, cultural, and other societal variables that make up the greater environment in which business is transacted (Level 5).

This heuristic follows a hierarchical linear model and an iterative, maximum likelihood multilevel statistical procedure will allow for the simultaneous evaluation of variables and their interactions at more than one level. Accompanying the discussion of each level and its hypothesized role in the turnover process are specific research questions to encourage empirical assessment.

The retention of sales talent, once acquired, has proven to be one of the most enduring and perplexing problems managers face. It is hoped the information and investigational guidance provided by this paper will encourage a new generation of research designed to increase understanding of *how to improve the retention of effective salespeople*.

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