

Influence of Human Resource Practices on Employee Intention to Quit

Michael Joseph Martin

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
In
Agricultural and Extension Education

Eric K. Kaufman, Chair
Cathy M. Sutphin
Lanny W. Hass
Michael T. Lambur

July 15, 2011

Blacksburg, VA

Keywords:

Cooperative Extension
Human Resources
Job Satisfaction

Intent to Quit
Organizational Commitment

Influence of Human Resource Practices on Employee Intention to Quit

Michael Joseph Martin

ABSTRACT

Reducing employee turnover through retention practices is an area of great interest to employers who depend on a highly skilled workforce. In recent years, Cooperative Extension has experienced the loss of many local agents/educators due to resignation and also retirement incentives offered as a cost saving measure to manage reduced funding. Due to the type of work, the training needed, and the small pool of qualified applicants, it is important to pay attention to the retention of newly hired Extension workers. Prior research suggests a linkage of factors that can predict the likelihood of new employees' intention to quit. Human resource practices including recruitment & hiring, compensation & benefits, training & development, and supervision & evaluation are items that can directly influence the level of job satisfaction of new employees as well as their level of commitment to the organization. The level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment can, subsequently, predict an employee's level of intention to quit. This paper will share findings of research conducted in the fall of 2010, which included 480 Extension agents/educators, representing 12 states in the Southern United States. The study targeted employees with less than six years of employment and investigated human resource practices that influence intention to quit. Findings indicate a significant relationship between perceptions of human resource practices and intention to quit, mediated by organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Accordingly, the research has important implications for the management of Cooperative Extension and anyone working in or preparing to work in related fields.

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my wife Billie Sue, and my twin daughters, Rachel and Christa. I love you guys. I am grateful for your patience as this journey in my life has consumed much of the time that I could have spent with you. Your encouragement and prayers have been greatly appreciated. If not for your loving encouragement over the past five years, I would have given up a long time ago. I also wish to thank my parents, Kenneth and Joyce Martin for their inspiration and support during this effort. Last but not least, I dedicate this paper to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I know that I could not have been successful in this without His guidance and strength.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank many individuals for their encouragement and assistance which allowed me to complete this research study. With the time and involvement required for completion of a task like this, I am sure that I will overlook someone who has assisted me along the way. However, I will attempt to recognize the impact of a few that come to my mind.

First of all, I thank Ms. Susan Jackson for her persistent encouragement for me to enroll and start taking classes. My original advisor, Dr. Patricia Sobrero for getting me started, and Dr. Daisy Stewart and Dr. John Hillison for their support early on in my journey. I would like to acknowledge my graduate committee consisting of Dr. Nancy Franz, my first chair, and the rest of the committee, Dr. Michael Lambur, Dr. Lanny Hass, and Dr. Cathy Sutphin for keeping me focused and on track. I am particularly thankful to Dr. Eric Kaufman who was gracious to take me on as doctoral student and assume duties as the chair of my committee for the last couple of years. His interest in my research, along with his guidance and support has been critical to my success. I would like to acknowledge my supervisors during the past five years, Dr. Mark McCann, Dr. Rick Rudd, and Dr. Alan Grant, for supporting me and allowing me to take educational leave to dedicate time to work on my research. The time allowed was critical for me to finish my research in a timely manner. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Andy Overbay for his support, encouragement, and inspiration during the past five years. By watching him go through this just a few years ago, I was inspired to believe that I could do this too. In addition, I am grateful to Andy for serving as Interim District Director for me while I was on educational leave.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF TABLES	x
CHAPTER I- INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study	3
Description of Emergent Workforce.....	3
Commitment of Emergent Workers.....	4
Types of Organizational Commitment.....	5
Job Satisfaction and Intent to Quit.....	6
Impact of Turnover on Organizations.....	8
Human Resources (HR) Practices that Contribute to Turnover.....	8
Differential Turnover by Position Type.....	9
Unique Challenges of Extension.....	10
Extension’s Engagement of Emergent Workforce	12
Extension’s Organizational Type.....	12
Extension’s Turnover Challenges	13
Human Resource Challenges in Extension.....	14
Problem Statement	15
Purpose of the Study	18
Specific Objectives	18
Professional Significance of Study	19
Overview of the Methodology	20
Limitations of the Study.....	21
Terms and Definitions.....	21
Summary.....	23

CHAPTER II- LITERATURE REVIEW	25
Intent to Quit and Turnover	26
Turnover Research in Review.....	27
Job Satisfaction	30
Organizational Commitment.....	31
Human Resource (HR) Practices and Employee Motivation	33
Impact of Turnover on Organizations.....	34
Human Resource Practices Contributing to Turnover/Commitment.....	35
Recruitment and Hiring.....	36
Training and Development	36
Evaluation and Supervision	37
Benefits and Compensation	38
Employee Motivation.....	39
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory	39
Theory X and Theory Y	40
Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory	41
Cooperative Extension	41
Nature of Extension Work	43
Retention Issues	44
Summary	47
CHAPTER III- METHOD OF INVESTIGATION	49
Overview.....	50
Population and Sample	50
Instrumentation	52
Data Collection	54
Participant Demographics.....	55
Data Analysis	58
Correlational Analysis	58
Regression Analysis.....	58

Summary	60
CHAPTER IV- RESULTS	61
Objective 1: Describe Experiences with Human Resource Practices	61
Objective 2: Describe Employee Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit	68
Objective 3: Relationships between Human Resource Practices, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit	74
Objective 4: Explain Extension Agents’ Intent to Quit Based Upon Human Resource Practices	78
Summary	90
CHAPTER V- SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION	91
Statement of Problem.....	91
Review of Methodology	92
Summary of Findings.....	94
Objective 1: Describe Experiences with Human Resource Practices	94
Objective 2: Describe Employee Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit	99
Objective 3: Relationships between Human Resource Practices, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment and Intent to Quit	100
Objective 4: Explain Extension Agents’ Intent to Quit Based Upon Human Resource Practices	102
Discussion of Results	105
Interpretation of Findings	105
Objective 1: Describe Experiences with Human Resource Practices	105
Objective 2: Describe Employee Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit	106
Objective 3: Relationships between Human Resource Practices, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit	108
Objective 4: Explain Extension Agents’ Intent to Quit Based Upon Human Resource Practices	109
Recommendations for Practice	111
Suggestions for Additional Research.....	113

References.....	115
Appendix A- Southern Region Extension Survey	126
Appendix B- Justification for Human Resource Questions.....	134
Appendix C- Letter to Extension Directors	136
Appendix D- Pre-notice to Extension Agents.....	137
Appendix E- Initial Letter to Participants.....	138
Appendix F- Follow-up Letter to Participants.....	139
Appendix G- Follow-up Letter to Participants	140

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1-1 <i>Intermediate Linkages in the Employee Withdrawal Process</i>	7
Figure 1-2 <i>Conceptual Model Showing Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment as Predictors of Intention to Quit</i>	18
Figure 2-1 <i>Intermediate Linkages in the Employee Withdrawal Process</i>	27
Figure 4-1 <i>Analysis of Extension Agents' Attitudes toward Human Resource Practices by Years of Employment</i>	67
Figure 4-2 <i>Analysis of Extension Agents' Intent to Quit Based on Annual Salary</i>	72
Figure 4-3 <i>Analysis of Extension Agents' Intent to Quit Based on Years Employed</i>	74
Figure 4-4 <i>Conceptual Model Showing Correlations between Human Resource Practices, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit</i>	77
Figure 4-5 <i>Conceptual Model for Intent to Quit</i>	83
Figure 4-6 <i>Conceptual Model for Organizational Commitment</i>	85
Figure 4-7 <i>Conceptual Model for Organizational Commitment</i>	87
Figure 4-8 <i>Conceptual Model for Job Satisfaction</i>	89
Figure 5-1 <i>Analysis of Extension Agents' Perceptions of Human Resource Practices by State</i> ...	96
Figure 5-2 <i>Analysis of Extension Agents' Perceptions of Human Resource Practices by Tenure</i>	99
Figure 5-3 <i>Conceptual Model Showing Correlations between Human Resource Practices, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit</i>	101

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1-1 <i>Turnover Rates for Virginia Cooperative Extension Agents</i>	14
Table 2-1 <i>Turnover Rates for Virginia Cooperative Extension Agents</i>	45
Table 3-1 <i>Characteristics of Study Participants, Extension Agents in 12 Southern States</i>	57
Table 4-1 <i>Extension Agents' Ratings on Statements Related to Human Resource Practices</i>	63
Table 4-2 <i>State-Level Summary of the Agreement Levels with Statements about Human Resource Practices</i>	66
Table 4-3 <i>Summary of the Agreement Levels with Human Resource Practices by Tenure</i>	68
Table 4-4 <i>Summary of Scores on the Intent to Quit, Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, and Job Satisfaction Survey Instruments based upon State</i>	70
Table 4-5 <i>Summary of Scores on the Intent to Quit, Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, and Job Satisfaction Survey based upon Salary</i>	71
Table 4-6 <i>Summary of Scores on the Intent to Quit, Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, and Job Satisfaction Survey based upon Tenure</i>	73
Table 4-7 <i>Pearson's Product Moment Correlations for Extension Agents' Perceptions of Human Resource Practices and Attitudes on Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit</i>	76
Table 4-8 <i>Standardized Regression Models for Intent to Quit: Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Intent to Quit based upon Human Resource Practices</i>	80
Table 4-9 <i>Standardized Regression Models for Intent to Quit: Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Intent to Quit based upon Human Resource Practices</i>	81
Table 4-10 <i>Reduced Regression Model for Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Intent to Quit</i>	83
Table 4-11 <i>Reduced Regression Model for Organizational Commitment: Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Organizational Commitment</i>	85
Table 4-12 <i>Reduced Regression Model for Organizational Commitment: Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Organizational Commitment</i>	87
Table 4-13 <i>Reduced Regression Model for Job Satisfaction: Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Job Satisfaction</i>	89
Table 5-1 <i>Turnover Rates for Virginia Cooperative Extension Agents</i>	92

Table 5-2 *Standardized Regression Models for Intent to Quit: Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Intent to Quit based upon Human Resource Practices*103

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Voluntary turnover of valued employees is a concern of managers and administrators due to the financial costs of replacing that employee and the lost productivity of a good employee. Voluntary turnover is different than involuntary turnover in that it is based upon the employee's deliberate decision to separate from an organization. Voluntary turnover occurs through resignation or retirement whereas; involuntary turnover is a result of termination through an employee being fired or laid off (Lee, Gerhart, Weller, & Trevor, 2008). (Throughout this dissertation, the term "turnover" will refer to voluntary turnover.) Reducing excessive levels of turnover through retention practices is an area of great interest to employers who depend on a highly skilled workforce.

The current workforce contains four distinct generations of workers including: matures/veterans, baby boomers, generation x, and generation y. Each generation comes with distinct features describing who they are and the societal changes that shaped them (Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 2005). However, scholars recently identified a group of workers that crosses all generational boundaries. This new group is called the emergent worker. Emergent workers differ from traditional workers due to their work circumstances and experiences. Emergent workers have resulted from a paradigm shift due to the downsizing and outsourcing of corporations and organizations in the 1980's and 1990's and even into the present (Spherion, 2010). Emergent workers are not accustomed to lifetime employment with the same organization. They want to control their own careers and have little fear of job change. In essence they are looking for employers who will provide them with professional development

and growth opportunities, work/life balance, a way to be creative, and opportunities for high responsibility (Spherion, 2010).

The weak economy and high unemployment rates resulting from recession has kept many employees from leaving their current employer. However, as the economy recovers and opportunities for employment increase, non-engaged or underappreciated emergent workers will be ready to leave their current positions (McKeown, 2010). In organizations where relationships are extremely important to the success of their mission, frequent turnover of highly valued employees can be detrimental. In Cooperative Extension, these highly valued employees are the local agents and have been described as “the heart and soul of the Cooperative Extension Service” (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997, p. 52).

In recent years, Cooperative Extension has experienced the loss of many local agents due to retirement incentives offered as a cost saving measure to manage reduced appropriations in funding.

When county Extension agents voluntarily leave their positions, an interruption in the local Extension programming is likely to occur. Even if the position is filled quickly, the replacement agent will need time to become familiar with the local situation to be effective. Agent turnover often times results in disrupted programming efforts while the new agent is being selected and undergoes an acclimation period to the local situation. (Rousan & Henderson, 1996, pp. 56-57)

With this loss of experienced employees, a knowledge gap has been created with the on-boarding of replacement workers. Due to the type of work, the training needed, and the small pool of qualified applicants for these positions, it is important to pay attention to the retention of newly hired Extension workers.

Background of the Study

To understand the importance of this study, the circumstances surrounding the emergent workers and turnover must be examined. The background of this study investigated who this group of new workers are; what influences their job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and intention to quit; the impact of turnover on organizations; human resource practices that contribute to employee turnover; and how different types of organizations are impacted by turnover.

Description of Emergent Workforce

Emergent workers are a category of the workforce that is becoming more recognized as an important component of the current and future workforce. For the past 12 years, this group of workers has been studied annually by a staffing organization known as Spherion which stated that the economic problems of 2008 was a pivotal moment in the workers entering the workforce (Spherion, 2010). The downsizing of the 1980's and 1990's also created a paradigm shift in the way that people view their work life and manage their careers (Harding, 2000). Emergent workers are different from traditional workers. Traditional workers have a belief that the employer is responsible for their career, that their level of commitment to the organization is based upon long-term job security, and that they should always follow organizational rules. They prefer employer set goals and a predictable work schedule. Lifetime employment is seen as an expectation or reward for loyalty (Spherion, 2010).

Emergent workers are not bound by age, gender, industry, region or culture and are expected to represent the majority of the American workforce in the near future. An emergent worker is the product of an employment environment consisting of downsizing, and an absence of lifetime employment (Harding, 2000). It is important to give serious consideration to the

impact of this emergent worker when studying organizational management issues, as they are expected to make up the majority of workers as more traditional workers make the shift in mindset to an emergent worker mindset (Spherion, 2010).

Commitment of Emergent Workers

So what makes the emergent worker different from a traditional worker? Emergent workers have not been accustomed to employer provided retirement programs and 30 year service pins from the same employer. They are taking charge of their own careers and looking for opportunities for growth and development that can ensure their own career security. This highly skilled, sought-after group of workers is also the most difficult to retain, given their no-fear perspective on job change (Spherion, 2010). This does not necessarily mean that the emergent worker is any less loyal than a traditional worker, but it does mean that employers need to pay special attention to retaining these individuals through opportunities for growth and developing a connection to them. Emergent workers see loyalty as the level of contribution that they make to an organization as opposed to how long they stay employed with the same organization. Traditional workers, on the other hand, see loyalty as the willingness to stay with an employer for many years (Harding, 2000). Emergent workers also see job change as being positive for their careers as they believe that they must keep growing and developing if they are going to “get ahead.” Although loyalty and commitment are synonyms, the two words do not always mean the same thing. In fact, even when the term commitment is used, it can take on different meanings depending on the context of use.

Types of Organizational Commitment

One factor that may contribute to employee connection is known as organizational commitment. Many studies have been conducted in the area of organizational commitment. The theory of organizational commitment was established by Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian (1974). Their definition of organizational commitment discusses three major components including “a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization’s goals, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a definite desire to maintain organizational membership” (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974, p. 604).

Meyer and Allen (1991) expanded on this theory by adding three components of commitment: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Affective commitment is defined as the emotional attachment, identification, and involvement that an employee has with its organization and goals. Continuance commitment is the willingness to remain in an organization because of the investment that the employee has with “nontransferable” investments such as retirement, relationships with other employees, or things that are special to the organization. It takes into account the costs associated with leaving the organization, such as the time invested by the employee or unfavorable economic conditions. Normative commitment is a feeling of obligation to stay with an organization. This could be related to societal expectations or family influences that have taught that one must be loyal to their employer. “Common to the three approaches is the view that commitment is a psychological state that (a) characterizes the employee’s relationship with the organization and (b) has implications for the decision to continue or discontinue membership in the organization” (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993, p. 539). “Most empirical studies of organizational commitment have focused on affective commitment. This is because affective commitment is the strongest

and most consistent predictor of organizationally desired outcomes such as employee retention” (Mohamed, Taylor, & Hassan, 2006, p. 514). It is therefore, important to study the affective commitment of employees as an indicator of attachment to the organization as it relates to the intention to quit employment with the organization.

Job Satisfaction and Intent to Quit

Intention to quit is the psychological process that an individual goes through when they are considering alternative employment options due to some measure of dissatisfaction with their current employment situation. The ultimate decision to leave results when job dissatisfaction is at a level sufficient that the employee has reached a decision on the desirability of movement and the perceived ease of movement (March & Simon, 1958). Mobley (1977) suggested a heuristic model of intention to quit as being the last step prior to actual quitting. This intention to quit is preceded by several decisions that an individual would make prior to coming to the decision to quit. Low levels of job satisfaction lead to the initiation of the thought process. In 1978, Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth developed a simplified version (Figure 1-1) of Mobley’s 1977 model which suggested the following causal linkages: job satisfaction→thoughts about leaving; thoughts about leaving→intention to search; probability of finding an acceptable alternative→intention to search; intention to search→intention to quit; and intention to quit→turnover (Mowday, Koberg, & McArthur, 1984).

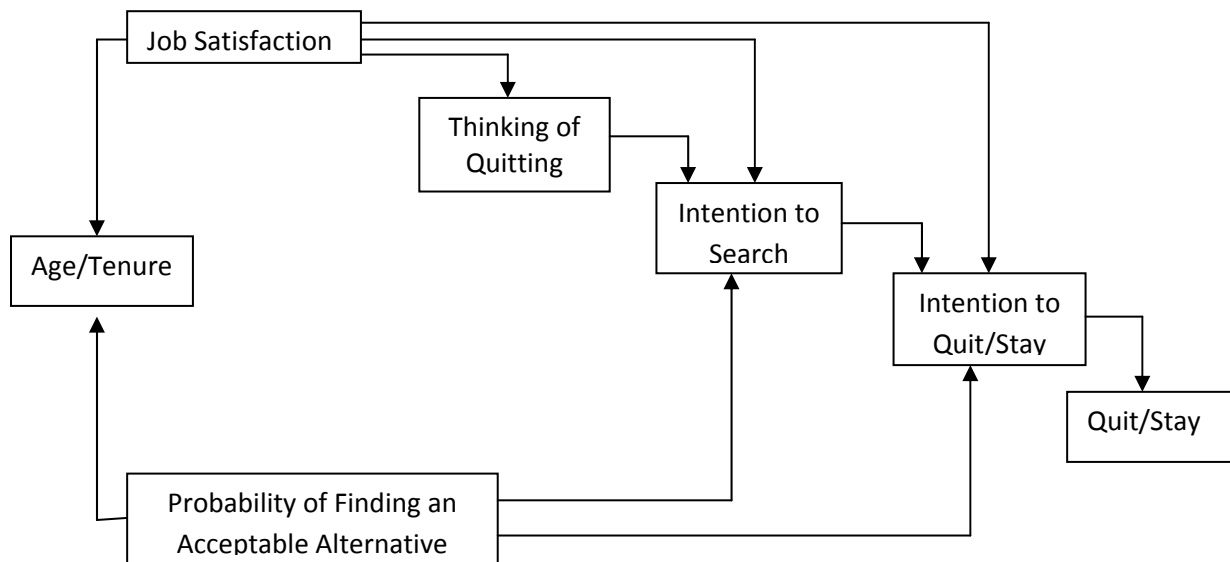


Figure 1-1. Intermediate linkages in the employee withdrawal process. Adapted from "An Evaluation of Precursors of Hospital Employee Turnover," by W.H. Mobley, S.O. Horner, and A.T. Hollingsworth, 1978. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 62, p.410. Used under Fair Use, 2011.

Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth (1978) viewed age and tenure as having an indirect effect on turnover through job satisfaction and the probability of finding an acceptable alternative. The model suggests job satisfaction has a direct influence on thinking of quitting, intention to search, and intention to quit/stay, but an indirect influence on actual turnover. Several empirical tests of this model have been conducted, concluding that the best predictor of turnover was intention to quit (Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978, Michaels & Spector, 1982, Spencer, Steers, & Mowday, 1983, Mowday, Koberg, & McArthur, 1984). With an understanding of the primary issues involved in employee turnover decisions, quality research on employee turnover should include three key variables: organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and intention to quit.

Impact of Turnover on Organizations

Employee turnover is an expensive proposition for companies and organizations. Direct costs include recruitment, selection, and training of new people. Indirect costs include such things as increased workloads and overtime expenses for coworkers, as well as reduced productivity associated with low employee morale. Taking into account both the direct and indirect costs of employee turnover, the minimum cost equates to one year's pay and benefits and a maximum of two year's pay and benefits (Ramlall, 2005).

Not all turnover is bad for an organization. Turnover is a natural part of organizational operations; less than five percent turnover is actually considered unhealthy (Hurley, 2010). Turnover offers opportunity to keep the organization dynamic by introducing employees with new ideas, new skills and personalities. It also allows an opportunity to replace marginal workers with more productive workers. When budgetary times are tight, turnover of employees can offer opportunities to reduce costs through salary savings until economic situations improve (Marcus, 2010).

Human Resources (HR) Practices that Contribute to Turnover

There are many potential causes for turnover; sometimes the causes are related to the HR practices of the organization and can be managed. These include such things as non-competitive compensation, high stress, working conditions, monotony, poor supervision, poor fit between the employee and the job, inadequate training, poor communications, and other organization practices (Mushrush, 2002). In order to address these issues, organizational leaders need to be aware of the needs and environmental circumstances surrounding their employees. Most high-level managers consider retention of the best employees to be an important part of their long-term business strategy. However, many companies do not have a framework in place to

effectively retain their employees (McKeown, 2010). Commitment of the organization, to the employee, can be expressed through HR practices and impact retention. High commitment HR practices that affect employee commitment include: “staffing, developmental appraisal, competitive and equitable compensation, and comprehensive training and development activities” (Whitener, 2001, p. 517). Considering the substantial costs associated with turnover, employers need to implement HR practices that reduce turnover as much as possible.

Differential Turnover by Position Type

High frequency of employee turnover is a problem that faces many different companies and organizations. The costs go beyond recruitment, hiring, and training of the employee; they include loss of productivity. Some organizations have been more accepting of turnover than others. For 2006, the total voluntary turnover rate for the United States was 23.4% (Nobscot Corporation, n.d.). The industries with the three highest annual turnover rates were: accommodation and food service at 56.4%, leisure and hospitality at 52.2%, and retail trade at 34.7%. The industries reporting the three lowest turnover rates were: government at 8.2%, educational services at 13.5%, and finance and insurance at 15.5% .

The significant variation in turnover rates from one industry to another may be attributed in part to the types of positions available. For instance in food and beverage service, many jobs involve repetitive actions, are part time with no benefits, and have few educational requirements. Training for most of these jobs can be conducted on the job under close supervision by an experienced employee and often lasts a couple of weeks or less. Training typically covers topics such as daily operations, menu, restaurant history, safe food handling and sanitation. Workers for these jobs are plentiful and they tend to be low-skilled, high school or

college age and do not expect to remain in the position for an extended period of time (United States Department of Labor (U.S. DOL), 2010).

On the other end of the spectrum, there is much less turnover in the government and educational services industry which tend to attract what is known as a knowledge worker. “A knowledge worker is someone who is employed because of his or her knowledge of a subject matter, rather than ability to perform manual labor. They perform best when empowered to make the most of their deepest skills” (Serrat, 2008, p. 12). The government and educational services industry employs some of the most highly skilled and educated workers in the labor force. About 64 percent of employees have at least a bachelor's degree. Many professional occupations also require a master's degree or doctorate, particularly for jobs at postsecondary institutions or in administration. The positions are generally full time with good benefits and earnings potential (U.S. DOL, 2010). These positions are typically public positions with accountability to tax payers. Positive relationships with clientele and customer service are important for continued public support. These positions require extensive training and investment by the employer. There are also more resources invested in the recruitment and hiring of these employees due to the unique nature of professional work. When they resign, it takes longer to fill the position with a qualified individual due to application requirements, which in turn creates more loss to the organization in terms of work productivity.

Unique Challenges of Extension

Cooperative Extension is a unique organization that is highly dependent on the support of locally based stakeholders who both participate in educational programs and also advocate for financial support of the organization. A positive relationship with stakeholders is critical for continued success of Extension (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997). In order to build

and maintain positive relationships with stakeholders, Extension must retain its best employees. The retention of Extension agents was identified as a challenge by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities' Extension Committee on Organization and Policy's Leadership Advisory Council (ECOP, 2005).

Cooperative Extension has the potential to suffer significantly in the areas of relationships and productivity when individuals retire or resign voluntarily. Due to the relational nature of Extension work, social networks are built over time that create social capital for the organization. These social networks are developed between co-workers and also between employees and clientele. Many of the clientele in Cooperative Extension are volunteers. In 2008, in Virginia alone, over 33,000 individuals volunteered over 1,000,000 hours of time in assistance and delivery of Extension educational programs (Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2009). With continued economic problems, Extension programs are struggling to provide services on smaller budgets and with fewer personnel. Volunteer use will become increasingly important, and these volunteers will need the support of organizational professionals. Poor volunteer management causes more people to stop volunteering than lost interest through personal circumstances (Brudney & Meijs, 2009).

Over time, a trust builds between individuals that facilitate effective Extension programming, and that trust is monetized in the form of social capital. Employees who have developed strong social capital possess a strong network of relationships and are valuable in terms of having access to both information and resources for their employer. They are also effective in attracting other high-performing individuals into their organization and maintaining strong network ties to external stakeholders such as clients, funding partners, and collaborating agencies (Dess & Shaw, 2001). When an Extension agent leaves after only a short period of

employment, they are not as likely to have built as much social capital in their community and among their co-workers as someone who has committed more time to the organization and the community. Thus, when there is frequent turnover of newly hired Extension agents, the potential benefits of social capital are lost.

Extension's Engagement of Emergent Workforce

Cooperative Extension has experienced and is currently experiencing budgetary problems that are forcing states to redesign and restructure how educational programming is conducted. One way that states are managing this budgetary shortfall is through early retirement options for employees (Morse, 2009). A result of these retirements is the need to hire new workers for critical positions. Considering that over half of America's current workforce falls within the emergent workforce category, Cooperative Extension needs to be conscious and attentive to the type of system that will be favorable to retention of emergent workers.

Extension's Organizational Type

Extension work falls in the government and educational services sector of organizations. As indicated earlier, this type of knowledge work requires a highly educated workforce. Although, turnover rates in this type of work tend to be much lower than in other types of work, it is important to maintain low turnover rates because Extension is a relational business. People and information are the business of Extension. In many cases, Extension employees are the only individual in their locality who conducts the type of work that they do. Extension work is demanding work. It consists of multiple tasks, working with a variety of people on a variety of issues, and long work hours which often includes nights and weekends. Extension agents are information providers, volunteer managers, problem solvers, fund raisers, managers, supervisors,

collaborators, marketers, leaders, educators, writers, counselors, mentors, website managers, and more. Each day provides a unique opportunity for the Extension agent. Agents must also possess excellent social skills and enjoy working with people of all ages and diverse backgrounds. Although the position is demanding, it is also rewarding due to working with diverse audiences, having variety in the work, and knowing that you may have made a difference in someone's life (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997).

Many counties or cities only have one 4-H Extension Agent, one Agricultural Extension Agent, and/or one Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent with responsibilities for programming in that locality. When a vacancy occurs in any of these positions, other employees may try to assist in filling those voids for a period of time, but without training to conduct the needed work, the quality of educational programs declines and stakeholder support is likely to decline. Therefore, it is important to retain the best workers (Chandler, 2004).

Extension's Turnover Challenges

A study of The Ohio State University Extension reported net costs of \$80,000 per year due to turnover. This amount reflects the costs to replace all individuals minus the salary savings created by the vacancies (Kutilek, 2000). Although this cost may seem minimal, when it is multiplied across Extension systems in all 50 states, it is quite substantial. In addition, aside from the tangible costs to the organization, there are other costs to programs and relationships. Extension agents are valued by Extension administration, and it is important to retain agents in the counties to plan, implement, evaluate, and interpret educational programs for the clientele. When vacancies occur, they cost the organization in many ways: high cost of training and development, lost work time during a vacancy, time spent and burnout from coworkers attempting to fulfill assignments of other agents during a vacancy, time spent from supervisors

with the orientation and training of new employees, and decreased service and educational programming to clientele because of the vacancy (Chandler, 2004).

A problem that Virginia Extension has faced over the past few years is the turnover of Associate Extension Agents prior to promotion to Extension Agent (Table 1-1). This promotion takes place within the first five years of employment with the organization. In an effort to retain the best employees in Extension, attention must be directed to the causes for premature turnover and assess the culture and environment that currently exists as well as what can be modified to retain those employees.

Table 1-1

Turnover Rates for Virginia Cooperative Extension Agents

Year	Voluntary Turnover Rate	
	All Employees Pre-retirement	Employees of Less than Six Years
2009	6.5%	14.1%
2008	9.4%	15.8%
2007	10.8%	20.2%

Note. Data from personal communication with M. Christian, September 9, 2010.

Human Resource Challenges in Extension

From an HR perspective, retention of employees in Extension has challenges that include: financial, personnel, and training. In some cases pay was perceived to be insufficient for the amount of work performed by agents. Stress due to work situations such as multi-county assignments, staff cuts and downsizing attributed to agent turnover. Balancing work and family

obligations created by situations such as working long and abnormal hours, including nights and weekends, also created some problems for Extension agents. Other issues contributing to agent turnover included lack of strong and consistent training and dissatisfaction with advancement opportunities (Strong & Harder, 2009).

Since Extension is a public agency and depends on public funding, it is also subject to political changes. Funding for Extension work comes primarily from state government resources, but local governments and the federal government also contribute a significant portion. When economies are struggling and revenues do not meet budget demands, distribution of funds from all three sources are at risk of being reduced or cut altogether. Extension depends on people with 75-85% of the financial resources being dedicated to salaries and benefits. The remaining portion of funding provides operational support primarily for supplies, postage, printing, equipment, recruitment, training, and travel. Since a high percentage of funding is dedicated to personnel, when financial distributions are reduced, personnel reductions often follow. The first place that personnel reductions often take place is through retirement and attrition and then by keeping the vacated positions unfilled for a period of time or eliminating them altogether. Due to budgetary shortfalls, salary increases may be reduced or eliminated as a cost saving measure. When employees are not recognized for their good work, retention of employees can become a problem (M. Christian, personal communication, August 21, 2010).

Problem Statement

Employee turnover is a cause for concern when the best and brightest employees are leaving your organization for another, and there may be something that you could do to retain those employees. Turnover is costly for organizations. Direct costs such as recruitment, selection, and training of new employees, as well as indirect costs, such as stress on remaining

workers, reduced productivity, and low morale for organizations, can cost as much as two year's pay and benefits (Ramlall, 2005). With emergent workers being the newest category of worker, organizations need to pay attention to retention of these highly skilled employees as they have a no-fear perspective on job change (Spherion, 2010).

In Cooperative Extension, agent relationships with clientele, volunteers, and other stakeholders, are critically important as participation in Extension programs is voluntary and government funding of Extension is discretionary. As such, many states are exploring alternative funding options such as grants, contracts, and fees (Seevers, Graham, Gamon & Conklin, 1997). Disruption or dissolution of these relationships can be detrimental to the future of Extension.

A problem that Virginia Extension has faced over the past few years is the turnover of Associate Extension Agents prior to promotion to Extension Agent. For continued employment, this promotion is mandatory by the sixth year of employment. Total voluntary turnover rates (excluding retirements) for the past three years have ranged from 6.5% to 10.8%. What is more concerning, however, is the report of those with less than six years of employment who voluntarily left Virginia Cooperative Extension ranging from 14.1% to 20.2% over the past three years (Table 1-1).

In an effort to retain the best employees in Extension, attention must be directed to the causes for premature turnover and assess the culture and environment that currently exists, as well as what can be modified from an organizational perspective to retain those employees. Important measures of retention of employees are the level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment of the employees.

Prior research suggests a conceptual model that shows a linkage of factors that can predict the likelihood of new employee's intention to quit employment (Figure 1-2). HR practices including recruitment, hiring, benefits, training and development, supervision and evaluation, are items that can directly influence the level of job satisfaction of new employees as well as their level of commitment to the organization. The level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment can, subsequently predict an employee's level of intention to quit. As mentioned previously, studies have been conducted which indicate that the best predictor of actual turnover was intention to quit (Mowday, Koberg, & McArthur, 1984). Mueller, Boyer, Price and Iverson (1994) stated that "when employees are both satisfied with their jobs and committed to the organization, the bond with the organization will be strengthened and will result in greater cooperation and a reduced likelihood of quitting" (p. 182). Although there has been research conducted by other researchers in regard to organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and intention to quit among Extension agents (Carter, 1989, Strong & Harder, 2009, Scott, Swartzel, & Taylor, 2005, Rousan & Henderson, 1996), none have investigated this phenomenon targeted at Extension Agents in their initial years of employment or looked at HR practices and their influence on intent to quit.



Figure 1-2. Conceptual Model showing job satisfaction and organizational commitment as predictors of intention to quit

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of HR practices on the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of new Extension agents as they relate to intent to quit.

Specific Objectives

There are four objectives of the study:

- Describe Extension agents' experience with HR practices during the first six years of employment.
- Describe newly hired Extension agents' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to quit.
- Identify the relationship between HR practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit.

- Explain newly hired Extension agent's intent to quit based upon HR practices.

Professional Significance of Study

This study examines the HR practices that influence the intentions of newly hired extension agents to quit employment with cooperative extension. Cooperative Extension in many states is experiencing reductions in funding and, as a cost savings measure, has offered incentives for Extension agents to retire and has looked at restructuring models to operate more efficiently with fewer employees (Morse, 2009). As tenured employees retire, new employees will be recruited and hired to take their places. In a time where a new type of worker, known as the emergent worker, is a growing part of the pool of qualified applicants for Extension agent positions, consideration must be given to positioning the organization so that new hires will remain long enough to make programmatic impacts and build the relationships necessary for organizational success. Emergent workers are demanding an organizational setting that gives them opportunities for growth and development, a fulfilling work environment, rewards based upon performance, an opportunity to think creatively, an opportunity for advancement, work/life balance, and flexible work options (Harding, 2000). "Organizations simply can't afford to invest in the recruitment and hiring of talent, only to see them walk out the door or fall short of job requirements" (Spherion, 2010, p. 3). HR practices are one area of organizational practice that the organization has influence over. Through identifying human resources practices that can be implemented or modified to attract and retain new workers, cooperative Extension can be better positioned for increased public support and organizational success.

Overview of the Methodology

This quantitative study was conducted by using an online questionnaire. A purposeful sample of forty (40) Extension agents from each state in the Southern Region who have been employed for less than six years were invited to participate. The dependant variable is employee intent to quit. Independent variables include the HR practices of recruitment and hiring, training and development, compensation and benefits, evaluation and supervision. These independent variables are mediated by both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The online questionnaire consisted of general demographic questions, experiential questions about HR practices, questions to measure levels of job satisfaction, questions to measure organizational commitment, and finally questions to measure intention to quit.

The first objective was accomplished by describing Extension agents' experiences with human resource practices during their first five years of employment. To measure job satisfaction, the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) developed by Spector (1985) was used. To measure organizational commitment, the short form of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), developed by Porter and his colleagues was used (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Finally, to measure intent to quit, three items developed by Landau and Hammer (1986) was used.

To identify the relationship between human resource practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit, a bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to determine the strength and relationship between variables. To explain newly hired Extension agent's intent to quit in terms of human resource practices, regression analysis was conducted to show how the dependent variable can be predicted by the independent variables. No causation is

implied in this study. (A more thorough and detailed description of the methodology will be in Chapter 3).

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to local Extension Agents who had been employed with Extension for less than six years. Due to the size of the Cooperative Extension System nationally, only the 13 states encompassed by the Southern Region of Extension were included in the study. Twelve of the states participated. Due to the autonomy of each state system, variability of economic circumstances of states across the nation, the fact that all 50 states have an Extension system that is unique from neighboring states, and a variety of other operational variables, the generalizability of the conclusions and recommendations of this study by Extension organizations as well as organizations outside of Extension, should be considered judiciously. Because of the variety of HR practices and structures from state to state, the findings are not generalizable to states beyond the study population. In addition, the measurement instruments used assessed only the perceptions of employees rather than direct measures regarding human resource practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit.

Terms and Definitions

Affective Commitment – The emotional attachment, identification and involvement that an employee has with its organization and goals (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Continuance Commitment- The willingness to remain in an organization because of the investment that the employee has with nontransferable investments such as retirement, personal relationships, years of employment and benefits (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Cooperative Extension – Educational System established by the Smith Lever Act of 1914 to

provide research based information, developed at Land-grant Universities, to the people (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2010).

Emergent Worker- New category of worker that has been created as a result of societal factors leading to downsizing, lack of lifetime employment, and loss of company sponsored retirement. Such workers are not limited by age, race, geography, gender or generation (Spherion, 2010).

Human Resource Practices- Organizational practices implemented to motivate, discipline, hire, and train employees (Robbins & Judge, 2007).

Intent to Quit- The behavioral intention to leave employment immediately prior to the actual turnover decision (Mowday, Koberg, & McArthur, 1984).

Involuntary Turnover- Loss of employee through termination such as being fired or being laid off (Lee, Gerhart, Weller, & Trevor, 2008).

Job Satisfaction- An affective or attitudinal reaction to a position of employment (Spector, 1985).

Knowledge Worker- Someone who is employed because of his or her knowledge of a subject matter, rather than ability to perform manual labor (Serrat, 2008).

Land Grant University- State university established as a result of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 to make education available to all citizens (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997).

Local Extension Agent- A professional employee of the Extension service located in a County or in a municipality (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997).

Normative Commitment – The feeling of obligation that an employee has to the employing organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Organizational Commitment- The strength of an employee’s identification with and involvement in an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Voluntary Turnover – The loss of employee due to their own will such as resignation or retirement (Lee, Gerhart, Weller, & Trevor, 2008).

Summary

Employee turnover is a cause for concern when the best and brightest employees are leaving your organization for another, especially when there may be something that you could do to retain those employees. Turnover is costly for organizations and includes the direct costs of recruitment, selection, and training as well as indirect costs such as worker stress, lost productivity, and low morale. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of HR practices on the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of new Extension agents as they relate to intent to quit. Objectives included:

- Describe Extension agents’ experience with HR practices during the first five years of employment.
- Describe newly hired Extension agents’ job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to quit.
- Identify the relationship between HR practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit.
- Explain newly hired Extension agent’s intent to quit based upon HR practices.

The following chapters of this dissertation will discuss the relevant literature, the methodology used for the research, results of the findings, and finally a discussion of the conclusions along with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Retention of high performing employees is important for organizations who seek to be successful. In his bestselling book, Jim Collins (2001) describes the organization as a bus and employees as the riders. “If we get the right people on the bus, the right people in the right seats, and the wrong people off the bus, then we’ll figure out how to take it someplace great” (p. 41). Human resource departments are charged with the initial on-boarding of employees, and have significant influence on making sure that those new employees are happy and productive. When considering the pool of applicants that are available for hire, organizations must be aware that the composition of this group is diverse and generational lines are starting to blur when it comes to workplace and job expectations.

The new workforce has been described as the emergent workforce due to the fact that they are not bound by age, gender, industry, region or culture and that they are the product of an employment environment consisting of downsizing and an absence of lifetime employment (Harding, 2000). These new workers have also been described as viewing job change as a positive and are more confident than traditional workers of their marketability. To the emergent worker, loyalty is not measured so much in their length of employment with an organization, but to the contribution that they make to the organization (Spherion, 2010).

The importance of studying this new worker in light of organizational commitment is that organizations which depend on positive relationships with clientele and co-workers for success in their programs cannot afford to have employees who are not committed to the organization and leave after only a short amount of time on the job. Work/life balance programs, such as flexible work options and telecommuting, have also been shown to increase retention of the

emergent worker by allowing them to accommodate doctor's appointments, school activities, and other family priorities into their schedule. Spherion (2010) states that "employees at organizations where work/life balance programs are offered are much more likely to stay with their employer for at least the next five years and report higher job satisfaction" (p. 6).

It is important, therefore, to examine the organizational and individual factors that influence an employee's affective commitment to the organization, so that every effort can be made to retain the talent needed for organizational success and to meet organizational goals. Three areas of importance for this study include: intent to quit and turnover, human resource practices and employee motivation, and challenges of employee turnover to the Cooperative Extension system.

Intent to Quit and Turnover

Intent to quit is the dependent variable in this study. Research has shown that intent to quit is the best predictor of actual turnover behavior (Tett & Meyer, 1993, Steele & Ovalle, 1984, Mowday, Koberg, & McArthur, 1984). When looking to reduce the incidents of turnover of employees, organizations must look at the factors that impact that ultimate decision. In the turnover model developed by Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth (1978), intention to quit is the linkage that immediately precedes the actual decision to quit. Intent to quit has been found to be highly correlated to both job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Tett & Meyer, 1993, Mohamed, Taylor, & Hassan, 2006, Mowday, Koberg, & McArthur, 1984), therefore, it is crucial to this study and the outcomes thereof.

Turnover Research in Review

Research in the area of employee turnover traces back to the seminal work of March and Simon (1958). These researchers looked at antecedents to turnover and proposed that individual voluntary turnover decisions were influenced by the desirability of movement from the present position and also the ease of movement to another position (March & Simon, 1958). In 1977, Mobley took a closer look at the intermediate linkages that connect job satisfaction and the ultimate turnover decision (Figure 2-1). He specifically theorized that job satisfaction leads to the individual thinking of quitting, which in turn may lead to intention to search for alternatives and ultimately to an intention to quit and eventual turnover. In all of these decisions, the probability of finding an acceptable alternative is being considered (Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978).

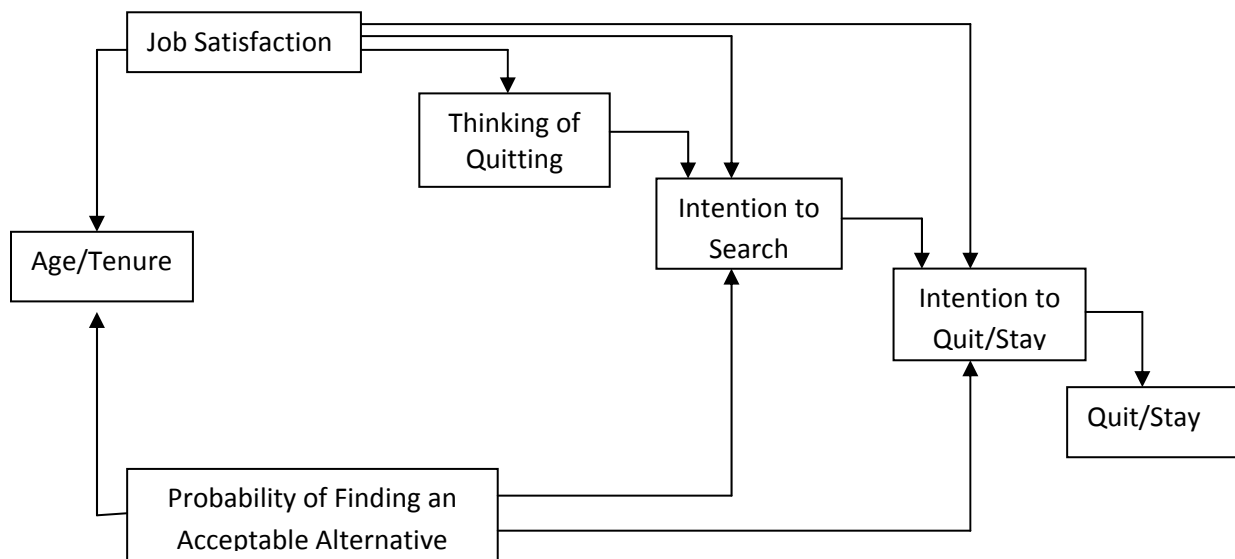


Figure 2-1. Intermediate linkages in the employee withdrawal process. Adapted from "An Evaluation of Precursors of Hospital Employee Turnover," by W.H. Mobley, S.O. Horner, and A.T. Hollingsworth, 1978, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 62, p.410. Used under Fair Use, 2011.

This model is a relatively simplistic expression of the decisions made by an individual contemplating leaving employment. As a result, subsequent research has attempted to fill in the gaps by looking at other factors that may influence an employee's decision to quit. It is also recognized that employees may not go through each of these steps prior to the decision to quit and may even take alternative paths (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). In 1979, Mobley, Griffeth, Hand and Meglino, reviewed the model and expanded it to include variables that are external to the individual. These variables included labor-market issues, such as unemployment rates, and organizational issues, such as practices and work conditions, in recognition that there are other factors that can influence an individual's decision to quit (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979). In 1981, Steers and Mowday built on the previous research and proposed an alternative path to the actual decision to quit. In addition to job satisfaction, Steers and Mowday proposed that organizational commitment and job involvement contributed to an employee's affective response to the job and that affective responses were seen as influencing the desire to stay or the intent to quit (Steers & Mowday, 1981).

In the same year, Price and Mueller (1981) developed a causal model for voluntary turnover. They proposed seven determinants that have an indirect impact on turnover through job satisfaction. Those determinants include: repetitive work, participating in job related decisions, being informed of job related issues, having close friends as co-workers, receiving good pay, being fairly compensated and having an opportunity to obtain a better job within the organization. Price and Mueller proposed that as job satisfaction increased, employee's showed a greater intent to stay with the organization.

In 1994, Lee and Mitchell proposed that the existing models of turnover were simplistic, (implying that turnover decisions are a linear, rational sequence) and did not describe all

turnover decisions. They purport that decisions to leave an organization can take place in many different ways. Their unfolding model of voluntary turnover provided an alternative theory about how and why people leave organizations, and proposing that individuals follow psychological and behavioral paths when quitting. The decisions regarding which path they would follow are determined by what is referred to as a “shock” or something that causes a person to pause and think about the meaning of that event in relation to his or her job (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). Shocks can be categorized as expected or unexpected, positive or negative, and personal or organizational. Shocks can be job related or personal related. Job related shocks include things such as organizational restructuring, new management, and changes in work assignment. Personal shocks include things such as marriage, pregnancy, and becoming debt free (Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, & Hill, 1999). Other considerations along the paths include the presence of job alternatives. Although this model is quite different from previous models, the authors acknowledge the importance and relevance of previous models of turnover (Lee & Mitchell, 1994).

Most recently, Maertz and Campion (2004) suggested four types of quitters that could be identified by the circumstances surrounding their decision to quit. The first type is impulsive quitters. These are employees who quit without any pre-planning and are usually motivated by a strong negative event. The spontaneous nature of this type makes it difficult for management to predict or prevent. The second type is comparison quitters. These employees are drawn away from their job through attractive alternatives and typically do not have strong negative affects toward their current employer. The third type is preplanned quitters. These employees have a goal in mind regarding when they will quit. This could be at the birth of a child or when a spouse retires, or even a decision to continue formal education. Ultimately, the decision to leave

is firm, and there is little that management can do to prevent it. The final type of quitter is the conditional quitter. Conditional quitters make decisions to quit when an uncertain event or shock occurs. This type of event or shock includes the possibility of a better job offer, being overlooked for a promotion, or may be related to work conditions such as the way they are treated by a supervisor. They typically experience some type of negative affect toward the organization (Maertz & Campion, 2004).

Although there has been great progress toward expanding the Mobley (1977) intermediate linkages model, it continues to be foundational to current research (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is an important component of an employee's commitment to their employing organization. Mueller, Boyer, Price, and Iverson (1994) stated that "when employees are both satisfied with their jobs and committed to the organization, the bond with the organization will be strengthened and will result in greater cooperation and a reduced likelihood of quitting" (p. 128). However, job satisfaction and organizational commitment have been shown to be different in relation to employee attitudes about their work. Job satisfaction is more focused on the individual's response to their job or to specific aspects of their job such as pay, supervision, and working conditions. Commitment, on the other hand, is more global in relation to the attitude of the employee toward the organization and its goals and values (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Therefore, while job satisfaction has been shown to be related to an employee's thoughts of quitting, and intention to quit has been found to be the best predictor of actual turnover (Mowday, Koberg, & McArthur, 1984, Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008), under certain circumstances, the level of commitment that the employee has to the organization may be

a better predictor of actual turnover (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974, Vandenberghe & Tremblay, 2008).

For instance, an employee may be dissatisfied with their pay or supervisor, but a high level of organizational commitment, may override that dissatisfaction and the employee will decide to remain with the organization. Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian (1974) reported that “the overall findings of this study suggest that in this type of organizational context, general attitudes toward the organization may be more important in the decision to remain than the more specific attitudes toward one’s particular job” (p. 608). Bateman and Strasser (1984) challenged this finding in their study of nursing employees where they found that organizational commitment is an antecedent of job satisfaction. The finding by Bateman and Strasser (1984) has been subsequently replicated and challenged by others in the field, and has received little support (Curry, Wakefield, Price, & Mueller, 1986). Researchers and scholars widely accept that job satisfaction has a determining effect on organizational commitment.

Organizational Commitment

The general attitudes of the employee toward the organization are considered as organizational commitment (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). Organizational commitment has been defined as a psychological link between the employee and the employing organization that makes it less likely that the employee will voluntarily leave the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1996). Commitment studies in the recent era have been conducted at an increasing pace for the past 35 years. Noted pioneers of commitment research in relation to organizational commitment and employee turnover, are Lyman Porter, Richard Steers, Richard Mowday, and Paul Boulian. Organizational commitment can be measured by looking at related behaviors or attitudes. Behavioral commitment focuses on the actions taken or significant

contributions made by an individual that commits them to the organization. Attitudinal commitment on the other hand, is a psychological state where the individual identifies with a particular organization and its goals, and wishes to maintain membership in order to facilitate the goals (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). In 1974, Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian, looked at the attitudinal construct of organizational commitment and subsequently, developed a 15-item measure of employee organizational commitment, called the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). They proposed that organizational commitment could be categorized as: “(a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization’s goals and values; (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; (c) a definite desire to maintain organizational membership” (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974).

In recent literature, John Meyer and Natalie Allen are frequently referenced researchers in the field of organizational commitment. These researchers came on the scene in the mid 1980’s and early 1990’s and expanded on the work by the previous researchers. They argued that commitment has three separate components which reflect; “(a) a desire (affective commitment), (b) a need (continuance commitment), and (c) an obligation (normative commitment) to maintain employment in an organization” (Meyer & Allen, 1991). They believed that a better understanding of the employees’ relationship with the organization could be better understood if all three forms of commitment were considered together (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993). As a result, they developed new measures for organizational commitment based upon the three components so that they could better assess commitment across multiple dimensions.

With a struggling economy and a national unemployment rate hovering around 10 percent, many employees are staying where they are. This phenomenon of commitment has been

described as continuance commitment since the employee remains with the organization because they have to do so (Meyer & Allen, 1991). However, as the economy improves and employment options become more readily available, employees who have endured pay cuts, organizational restructuring, and layoffs will be looking elsewhere for employment (Retention, 2010). Meyer and Allen (1996) found that affective commitment had the strongest correlation to both employee intention to leave and actual turnover. Meyer and Allen (1991) also suggested that the OCQ can be utilized by researchers in interpreting affective commitment when measuring that component of organizational commitment. Because of this, the OCQ will be utilized in this study to measure the organizational commitment of employees in Cooperative Extension.

Human Resource (HR) Practices and Employee Motivation

An understanding of HR practices and employee motivation is important when it comes to operational functions impacting employee behavior and attitudes, that the organization has control over. Although management cannot always prevent a valued employee from leaving, it is important to understand what can be done to minimize the occurrence of that decision. In consideration of how employees respond to actions taken by the organization, there is value in discussing Social Exchange Theory.

Social Exchange Theory has a history that traces back to the 1960's with work from Gouldner (1960) and Blau (1964). The theory describes a social exchange as unspecified obligations. Essentially, when one person does a favor for another person, there is some expectation of a future return (Gouldner, 1960). In regard to organizational commitment and job satisfaction, the exchange does not take place between individuals, rather it occurs between the employee and the employing organization. This type of exchange is known as perceived organizational support and was designed to explain the development of employee commitment to

an organization (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). The perceived organizational support model has also been associated with intentions to quit. Employees who view an employer as having low support for them are more likely to look for employment somewhere else (Guzzo, Noonan, & Elron, 1994). Allen, Shore, and Griffeth (2003), in a study of department store salespeople and insurance agents, found that employee perceptions of supportive HR practices (including participation in decision making, fairness of rewards, and growth opportunities) have a relationship to withdrawal intentions, or intention to quit.

Organizational practices can influence not only organizational commitment, but also intention to quit. When the employee perceives a high level of commitment to them from the organization, their intent to quit will be lower (Allen, Shore, & Griffith, 2003). Three issues of importance when looking at HR practices are: the impact of turnover on organizations, HR practices contributing to turnover and commitment, and employee motivation.

Impact of Turnover on Organizations

Turnover of employees can have both positive and negative impacts on an organization. When the turnover is of an employee that is struggling in their work, or is a low performer, voluntary turnover may be a positive thing for the organization. However, when an organization loses a high performing employee through their resignation, the costs to the organization can be many. Financial costs incurred due to turnover will be as much as two times their annual salary on average (Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 2005). Other costs are not necessarily financial in nature. These can be described as indirect costs and include impacts such as reduced service to clientele, lost business to competitors, reduced employee morale and increased turnover by remaining employees, and potential loss of future leadership (Griffith & Hom, 2001). This is true in regard to Extension work as well. Rousan and Henderson stated that “when county Extension agents

voluntarily leave their positions, an interruption in the local Extension programming is likely to occur. Even if the position is filled quickly, the replacement agent will need time to become familiar with the local situation to effective” (Rousan & Henderson, 1996, p. 56). Dess and Shaw (2001) also studied the impact of voluntary turnover in regard to loss of social capital. Social capital occurs when positive relationships are built between individuals. When that relationship is broken due to voluntary turnover, organizational performance can be negatively impacted. Those negative impacts can be a result of lost skills, broken teams, and broken relationships with clientele and stakeholders.

Human Resource Practices Contributing to Turnover/Commitment

Why is it important to consider HR practices in regard to the turnover and commitment of employees to an organization? In a 1999 study of over 7500 US workers, Watson and Wyatt International found that HR practices and trust in management had the strongest impact on building commitment (Watson Wyatt, 1999). A study conducted from the social exchange theory perspective shows that organizations which exhibit a high level of commitment to their employees through HR practices, are rewarded with increased organizational effectiveness, employee involvement and commitment to the organization (Whitener, 2001). These high commitment HR practices include items such as selective staffing, developmental appraisal, competitive and equitable compensation, and comprehensive training and development activities (Whitener, 2001). Huselid (1995) found nearly one thousand firms, which invest in high performance HR management practices, including: comprehensive employee recruitment and selection procedures, incentive compensation and performance management systems, and extensive employee involvement and training. These practices were found to have both an economically and statistically significant impact on employee turnover and productivity

(Huselid, 1995). HR practices can also be classified as control practices. This approach aims to increase efficiency, reduce direct labor costs and relies on strict work rules and procedures, and bases rewards on outputs (Arthur, 1994). Arthur (1994) found that HR systems built on commitment rather than control, were associated with lower turnover and higher productivity.

Although HR practices have been shown to influence turnover, literature does not support a direct link between the two variables (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003, Bergiel, Nguyen, Clenny, & Taylor, 2009). Managers need to be aware that human resource practices can create links, make better fits, and create greater potential sacrifices for employees who may be looking elsewhere for employment, but may not result in lower incidents of turnover (Bergiel, Nguyen, Clenny, & Taylor, 2009).

Recruitment and hiring. The first action of HR is the recruitment and hiring of new employees. It is important to be honest with potential hires up front about the expectations of the job that they are applying for. Studies show that realistic job previews (Wanous, 1992) increase the job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job survival of new hires instead of utilizing an approach of doing whatever it takes to get the employee to accept an employment offer. Why are realistic job previews important? When companies provide accurate information, applicants are better able to determine whether the job will meet their specific needs. By knowing the less desirable aspects of their job, applicants can better prepare for when they occur. Honesty to the applicants, even at risk of losing the potentially valuable employee, may create an impression of trustworthiness (Meyer & Allen 1997).

Training and development. When an employee is hired, it is important that they receive acknowledgement and positive support from experienced employees. This can be defined as “investiture” based upon a study of the dimensions of organizational socialization by Van

Maanen and Schein in 1979. When a new employee is ignored or discouraged, they become the victim of divestiture. Commitment is likely to be stronger when the organization uses investiture as opposed to divestiture techniques.

Training is an important component attributing to higher levels of organizational commitment. In a study by Tannenbaum, Mathieu, Salas, and Cannon-Bowers in 1991, assessing the commitment of U.S. Naval Training Command recruits, they found that organizational commitment increased following training. They also found that there was a strong positive correlation between commitment and employee's motivation for training. The more committed the employees were, the more they desired training. New employees, who receive a satisfying training experience, feel better about their ability to perform the tasks expected of them.

Evaluation and supervision. Organizational practices that influence the promotion and advancement of employees may also have an influence on their commitment to the organization. In Virginia, promotion is a requirement for continued employment as an Extension agent. Gaertner and Nollen (1989) found that commitment was higher among employees who had been promoted. Therefore, it can be expected that commitment levels would be higher for those employees who had achieved promotion than for those who had not yet been promoted. Since this study is directed at newly hired Extension agents, many of whom may not have achieved promotion, commitment due to promotion policies may be the best measure.

Robertson, Iles, Gratton, and Sharpley (1991), in a study of a large financial services organization, found that commitment and turnover intentions were strongly influenced by the outcome of early career evaluations. Those employees receiving negative feedback became less committed and more likely to consider leaving the company. It can be inferred that those

receiving positive feedback became more committed and more likely to remain with the company.

Benefits and compensation. Researchers often identify compensation among the most important factors for potential employees in considering to accept a job offer, however, what is not so clear is the impact that pay has in regard to retention of the new employee after hire (Barber & Bretz, 2000). This is important as the pay satisfaction of an employee upon their initial hiring does not necessarily mean that they will continue to be satisfied with their pay in the years to come. Currall, Towler, Judge, & Kohn (2005) found that pay satisfaction is significantly associated with the intent to quit in a study of public school teachers. In support of this finding, pay satisfaction has also been associated with increased organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and greater intent to stay in the position (Farrell & Rusbult, 1981, Lum, Kervin, Clark, Reid, & Sirola, 1998). It is evident, therefore, that compensation is an important variable to include in the present study.

Employment benefits include items such as retirement, health insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, paid leave, paid holidays, flexible scheduling, and educational assistance to name a few. These benefits have been shown to bond an employee to the employing organization and result in a strong correlation between benefits and turnover (Shaw, Delery, Jenkins, & Gupta, 1998). However, policies that allow for work/life balance are becoming increasingly important. These policies allow for employees to manage their daily activities outside of the work environment such as caring for children, or allowing for involvement in personal activities. Flex schedules, part-time options, job sharing, telecommuting and phased retirement are common approaches (Berger & Berger, 2004). Commitments to family pressures, community issues and other non-work related factors can influence the employees' likelihood of

staying with an organization (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, & Graske, 2001). It is important to consider work/life balance programs for employees, as this is one of the major needs expressed by the emergent worker (Spherion, 2010).

Employee Motivation

When looking at the issues of employee turnover and retention, it is important to consider the influences of motivation. Work motivation is defined as a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual's being, to initiate work-related behavior, and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration (Pinder, 2008). When an organization invests time, money, and other resources into employees who are not motivated to learn their job or perform the functions expected of them, that investment is wasted (Latham, 2007). There are three motivation theories that have withstood the tests of time and are considered as the best-known explanations for employee motivation. Those are Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Robbins & Judge, 2007).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Abraham Maslow introduced the hierarchy of needs theory in 1943. He proposed a sequential hierarchy of five basic needs. His theory was based upon the premise that higher-level needs are not important and are not manifested until lower-level needs are satisfied. The most basic needs of individuals are labeled as physiological needs and included such items as food, water, sex, sleep, and other bodily needs. (Cherrington, 1989). The next most important level of needs is safety. This included items such as security and protection from physical and emotional harm (Robbins & Judge, 2007). The third level of needs is social needs. This level of need included affection, love, and belongingness (Cherrington, 1989). The fourth level of needs is esteem needs. This level included self-respect,

status, prestige, and recognition (Cherrington, 1989). The highest level of need is self-actualization. Self-actualization is the drive to become what one is capable of becoming and achieving their potential (Robbins & Judge, 2007). The needs represented by Maslow's hierarchy can be applied to the work environment as a way to motivate employees. Pay and work hours can contribute to satisfying physiological needs. Safe working conditions, company benefits and job security help fulfill safety needs. Friendly supervision, and professional associations relate to social needs. Job title and social recognition help fulfill esteem needs. Finally, a challenging job, opportunities for creativity and advancement in the organization can fulfill self-actualization needs (Cherrington, 1989). The challenge for organizations is to consider these employee needs as they implement organizational practices.

Theory x and theory y. In 1960, Douglas McGregor proposed that employees are passive or even resistant to organizational needs unless there is some kind of intervention by management. This is known as Theory X. Theory X suggests that by nature, people dislike work, that they must be forced into achieving goals, that they will avoid responsibilities, and display little ambition (Robbins & Judge, 2007). Theory Y, on the other hand, is a more positive view and is based upon the assumptions that employees can view work as being as natural as work or play, that they will exercise self-direction if they are committed to objectives, that the average person can learn to accept and even seek responsibility and that many employees throughout an organization have the ability to make innovative decisions and not just those in management roles (Robbins & Judge, 2007). Although he proposed both views, McGregor believed that Theory Y assumptions were more valid than Theory X. From an employee motivation perspective, organizational practices such as participative decision making and responsible and challenging jobs could be successful techniques.

Herzberg's two-factor theory. In 1959, Frederick Herzberg introduced the two-factor theory, also known as the motivation-hygiene theory. This theory states that there are certain factors that were related to the content of the job that provided satisfying experiences for employees. These factors are called motivators and included achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth. The other part of the theory was that there are non-job-related factors that can cause dissatisfying experiences for employees. These factors are called hygiene factors and include company policies, salary, coworker relations, and style of supervision (Steers & Porter, 1991). The application for behind this theory for management is that by removing dissatisfying hygiene factors, peace in the workplace may be realized, but it will not serve as a motivator for the employee. In order to motivate employees, they should be offered opportunities for promotion, recognition, responsibility, personal growth and achievement (Robbins & Judge, 2007).

Cooperative Extension

With programs in all 50 states, the Cooperative Extension System is the largest adult education system in the nation (Peters and Jarvis, 1991). It is a part of the Land-grant university system which shares three primary missions. Those mission areas are teaching, research and Extension. The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 established Land-grant universities to educate citizens in agriculture, home economics, mechanical arts, and other practical professions. Extension was formalized in 1914, with the Smith-Lever Act. It established the partnership between the agricultural colleges and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide for cooperative agricultural Extension work. At the heart of agricultural Extension work, according to the Act, was:

- Developing practical applications of research knowledge.

- Giving instruction and practical demonstrations of existing or improved practices or technologies in agriculture.

Smith-Lever mandated that the Federal Government (through USDA) provide each state with funds based on a population-related formula. Today, the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) distributes these formula grants annually (USDA, 2010).

The primary financial support of Extension work is threefold. Federal, state and local governments partner in differing ways to support the structure of Cooperative Extension programs throughout the nation. Although the focus of Extension work has traditionally been agricultural, over the last century Extension has adapted to changing times and landscapes, and it continues to address a wide range of human, plant, and animal needs in both urban and rural areas. Today, Extension works in six major areas:

- 4-H Youth Development
- Agriculture
- Leadership Development
- Natural Resources
- Family and Consumer Sciences
- Community and Economic Development (USDA, 2010)

Regardless of the program, Extension expertise meets public needs at the local level. Although the number of local Extension offices has declined over the years and some local offices have consolidated into regional Extension centers, there remain approximately 2,900 Extension offices nationwide. Extension serves a growing, increasingly diverse constituency with fewer and fewer resources (USDA, 2010).

Nature of Extension Work

“The Cooperative Extension Service is unique. No other educational system involves so many levels that are interrelated, yet autonomous” (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997, p. 3). It is also a complex organization due to the interrelatedness of many factors.

It is an educational institution that differs greatly from the common mission of an educational institution in that it: has no fixed curriculum or course of study, confers no degrees and gives no diplomas, operates informally off campus and uses farms, homes and places of business as classrooms, uses instructors with a wide range of subject-matter expertise, has a large and heterogeneous audience, offers subject matter that is more practical than theoretical for immediate application to the solution of problems, is educational in nature with teaching conducted informally using a wide variety of teaching method, and requires a change of both mental and physical behavior for the application of the subject matter. (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997, p. 4)

Extension agents are autonomous in their work in that they are responsible for developing a personal action plan on an annual basis that outlines how they will spend their time and effort for the following year. These plans vary from individual to individual primarily due to the fact that programs are based upon the needs and desires of the people and the communities in which they work. For example, in an area of the country where soybean production is of critical importance, it would be expected that Extension agents would provide educational programming and technical assistance to soybean growers in that area. However, in another part of the country where no soybean production was taking place, it would not make sense for Extension agents to devote time and effort to programming related to soybean production.

Participation in Extension programs is voluntary. Therefore, marketing of programs is of critical importance. Extension agents must give attention to making sure that the programs that they conduct are not only of importance to the clientele whom they serve, they must also make sure to promote those programs. Promotion takes place primarily through utilization of newsletters, newspaper, radio, and more recently by the use of websites and interactive calendars. Extension agents must work to accommodate the schedules of individuals with interest in participating in their programs. As a result, Extension programs regularly take place during evening hours or on weekends (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997).

Cooperative Extension is a recipient of public funds for its operations and allocates limited funding to agents for conducting educational programs. Consequently, Extension agents must work to secure external funding to pay for equipment, program materials, supplies, rental of facilities, transportation, meals and other expenses related to conducting programs.

Occasionally, Extension agents may charge a nominal fee to help recover the costs associated with a program. As a public agency, Extension cannot be exclusive in program participation, so agents must also work diligently to ensure that programs are available and accessible to all people and that every reasonable effort is made to ensure that anyone interested in participating in programs has the opportunity to do so (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997).

Retention Issues

Retention of Extension agents and issues related to why Extension agents resign and why they remain in Extension as a career have been studied over the past few years. Although research has been conducted in this area, Extension agents still continue to leave Cooperative Extension prematurely (Strong & Harder, 2009). “Turnover among county Extension agents results in disrupted educational programs, unmet citizen needs, low morale among remaining

Extension professionals, and wasted financial and material resources dedicated to Extension agent on-boarding and in-service training” (Safrit & Owen, 2010, p. 2). A problem that Virginia Extension has faced over the past few years is the turnover of Associate Extension Agents prior to promotion to Extension Agent. For continued employment, this promotion is mandatory by the sixth year of employment. Total voluntary turnover rates (excluding retirements) for the past three years have ranged from 6.5% to 10.8%. What is more concerning, however, is the report of those with less than six years of employment who voluntarily left Virginia Cooperative Extension ranging from 14.1% to 20.2% over the past three years (Table 2-1). In an effort to retain the best employees in Extension, attention must be directed to the causes for premature turnover and assess the culture and environment that currently exists as well as what can be modified to retain those employees.

Table 2-1

Turnover Rates for Virginia Cooperative Extension Agents

Year	Voluntary Turnover Rate	
	All Employees Pre-retirement	Employees of Less than Six Years
2009	6.5%	14.1%
2008	9.4%	15.8%
2007	10.8%	20.2%

Note. Data from personal communication with M. Christian, September 9, 2010.

It is apparent that by reducing the turnover of Extension Agents, the organization would benefit in many ways. In a 1996 study by Rousan and Henderson regarding voluntary agent turnover in Ohio State University (OSU) Extension, the following reasons surfaced.

County agents are most likely to leave OSU Extension because of other priorities in their lives, another job offer, insufficient pay for the amount of work performed, family obligations, too many late night meetings, too many work responsibilities, attracted to more money elsewhere, conflicts with personal responsibilities, no time for personal relationships, too many requirements for advancement, conflict with values, and lack of recognition for a job well done. (Rousan & Henderson, 1996, p. 60)

These issues represent a diversity of reasons for leaving Extension work. Some reflect personal perceptions and priority conflicts while others represent issues that can be addressed by the organization. It is important from an organizational standpoint to look at both, but it is also important to look at factors that influence agents to remain in a career in Extension.

Arnold and Place (2010) conducted a study of Florida Agricultural Extension agents, and developed a grounded theory on why they remain in Extension. Seven major factors contributing to the decision to remain in Extension were found. Agents reported: encouraging feedback and internal pride; desire to work with public audiences; career benefits such as professional development and fringe benefits; external rewards and measurable performance indicators; the ability to affect societal change; supportive relationships; and the freedom and variety in their work as key determining factors of job satisfaction.

In a study of Texas Extension Agents, Chandler (2004) reported the organizational and individual reasons why county Extension agents chose to stay with Extension. The top organizational reasons were: Variety of work/scheduling, benefit/retirement package, no direct supervisor managing my work regularly, job security, and quality/support from Extension specialists. The top individual reasons were: Interesting work; personal satisfaction; opportunity to be creative through challenging work; and professional scheduling. Knowing why Extension agents remain in the organization should help in understanding what can be done from an organizational and HR perspective to retain new employees. The Extension system receives some oversight to national policies by the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP), however “the plans and policies are deliberately broad to ensure that each state and local program has the flexibility to address local issues and concerns” (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997, p. 46). Because of this flexibility, organizational practices from one state do not necessarily translate to another.

Summary

It is clear that much study has taken place in regard to organizational and individual factors that influence an employee’s job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Chandler, 2004, Watson & Wyatt, 1999). Correlations between job satisfaction and organizational commitment are high and have influence on an employee’s intention to quit (Allen & Meyer, 1996, Mueller, Boyer, Price, & Iverson, 1994, Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). Furthermore, intention to quit is a better predictor of actual turnover than either job satisfaction or organizational commitment (Mowday, Koberg, & McArthur, 1984, Steel & Ovalle, 1984). What has received relatively little attention in literature, however, is how HR practices influence the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of newly hired employees from an emergent

workforce and the subsequent impact on the intention of those employees to quit the organization. This present study adds to the literature by surveying a sample of newly hired Extension agents across thirteen Southern states and examining the direct influence of organizational practices on both job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and the indirect influence of HR practices on the employee's intention to quit. By using intention to quit as the dependent variable, the organization can identify HR practices that influence retention prior to the occurrence of turnover. Learning from those who leave is important, but learning from those who are current employees may help the organization to reduce turnover more effectively.

CHAPTER III

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of human resource practices on the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of new Extension agents as they relate to intent to quit. The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Describe Extension agents' experience with human resource practices during the first six years of employment
2. Describe newly hired Extension agents' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to quit
3. Identify the relationship between human resource practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit
4. Explain newly hired Extension agent's intent to quit based upon human resource practices.

Maintaining a quality workforce is important for any organization, but for complex organizations, like Cooperative Extension, retention of high quality workers is critical.

“Turnover among county Extension agents results in disrupted educational programs, unmet citizen needs, low morale among remaining Extension professionals, and wasted financial and material resources dedicated to Extension agent on-boarding and in-service training” (Safrit & Owen, 2010, p. 2). This study provided data identifying human resource practices that have a relationship to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit.

Overview

This study focused on local Extension agents from the Southern region who have been employed for less than six years. The Southern region consists of 13 states including: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (ASRED, 2010). Twelve states participated in the study. These states were chosen due to the accessibility of obtaining data as well as for purposes of integrating responses from more than one state to control for unique organizational conditions that may impact the responses. Because of the technology available to this population, an on-line questionnaire was determined to be the most appropriate survey method. This study was conducted from the quantitative perspective. Descriptive research methods were used to determine the subjects' experiences with human resource practices. Correlational research methods were used to show relationships between variables (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). No causation was implied in this research. Although the findings are not generalizable to states beyond the study population, extrapolations based upon the findings are appropriate. Extrapolation allows the researcher to make "modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions" (Patton, 2008, p.459). This approach allowed for the researcher to take information from varied geographic locations and analyze it for correlations and to show predictions of various independent variables (human resource practices, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment) on the dependent variable (intent to quit).

Population and sample

Since this study was concerned with employees who are considered emergent workers, the population that was investigated was all Extension agents in the Southern region of the

United States who had been employed for less than six years. A cross-sectional research design was chosen as it provided a snapshot of the variables included in the study, at one particular point in time. Specific data was not readily available for this population, however data showing the estimated number of all Extension agents in the Southern region regardless of employment tenure was available. The Excellence in Extension database reported approximately 4,000 Extension agents in the Southern region states. Based upon the fact that around 50% of Extension agents in Virginia have been employed for less than six years, and translating that percentage to the other states, the study population was estimated at 2,000. Based on Israel's (2009) table to determine sample size, this study sought a purposeful sample of 333 Extension agents who have been employed for less than six years. This response level would permit the results of this study to be reported with a confidence level of 95% and a precision of $\pm 5\%$ for any confidence intervals reported (Israel, 2009). Recognizing that a 100% response rate is unrealistic, the study oversampled the population, requesting 40 participants from each state in the Southern region.

The purpose in choosing employees employed for less than six years was that, in Virginia, promotion to Extension agent rank is required no later than the fifth year for continued employment (VCE, 2009). By the fifth year of employment, many Extension agents have made a decision to stay or leave Extension. By using the same tenure criteria with agents from the other states, there would be consistency in the sample between the states. The other reason for choosing this sample was that they fall within the definition of an emergent worker which has been the basis for this study on job satisfaction, organizational commitment and retention.

Instrumentation

The survey mode used for this study was an on-line questionnaire. This method was appropriate because the individuals intended to receive the survey had ready access to this technology. Because of the geographic area to be covered, the cost of mailing, and the time frame to conduct the study, an on-line questionnaire permitted the greatest response rate. The survey platform used was Survey Monkey, which is a web-based survey tool approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) as an acceptable on-line assessment tool.

The survey instrument measured the attitudes, knowledge and perceptions of the respondents. The instrument contained 51 questions (Appendix A). To determine demographics and also to describe Extension agents' experiences with HR practices during their first five years of employment, 17 closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions were asked. The closed-ended questions were asked as either dichotomous, where only two choices were offered or multi-chotomous questions, where multiple answers were available for choice (Brace, 2004). HR practices were divided into four categories including: recruitment and hiring, training and development, compensation and benefits, and supervision and evaluation (Appendix B). These four categories are common to the HR literature (Huselid, 1995). When utilized properly, these practices can improve the knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees; increase their motivation; reduce shirking; and enhance retention of quality employees while encouraging non-performers to leave (Jones & Wright, 1992). To measure job satisfaction, Spector's (1985) Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) was used. Of the original 36 items, 18 were included in this survey in an effort to limit the length of the survey instrument and decrease respondent fatigue. The 18 questions selected were representative of the nine facets measured in the full instrument. The nine facets included:

1. Pay
2. Promotion
3. Supervision
4. Fringe Benefits
5. Contingent Rewards
6. Operating Procedures
7. Coworkers
8. Nature of Work
9. Communication

The JSS uses a 6-item Likert-type scale (Spector, 1985). An example of these questions is: “I like doing the things I do at work.” A high score on this scale indicates a high level of job satisfaction.

To measure organizational commitment, the 9-item short form of Mowday, Steers, and Porter's (1979) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), was used. This measure utilizes a 7-point Likert-type scale. The internal consistency of the 9-item scale is generally equal to the full instrument which contains 15-items (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). An example of these questions is: “I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful.” A high score on this scale indicates a high level of commitment.

Finally, to measure intent to quit, three items developed by Landau and Hammer (1986) were used. This measure utilizes a 7-point Likert-type scale (Landau & Hammer, 1986). An example of this type of question is: “As soon as I can find a better job, I'll leave Cooperative Extension.” A high score on this scale indicates a high degree of intent to quit.

Content validity of the questionnaire was established by a panel of experts. The panel examined the format, wording, length of the instrument, item content, and general overall ease of use. To encourage participation, an incentive prize was offered as an award for those who responded to the questionnaire within the first two weeks of the initial notification. The incentive prizes included one \$50 gift card for each of the 12 states. To assure confidentiality, respondents wishing to be included in the prize drawing were directed to send an e-mail to the researcher indicating their desire to participate. Questionnaire responses were anonymous.

Data Collection

The data was collected through cooperation with administrative contacts from each of the 12 states involved in the survey. An initial contact in the form of an e-mail, was sent to the director of Extension in each state by the Dean and Interim Director of Virginia Cooperative Extension notifying them of purpose of the study, basic information about the study, and the importance of their participation (Appendix C). A personal contact was then made to the respective Director of Field Operations (DFO) or designee from each state by the researcher, requesting that they provide a listing of Extension agents who have been employed for less than six years to the researcher for participation in the study. The researcher conducted a stratified random sample of 40 Extension agents from each state. In a stratified sample, people are included in the sample in the same proportion to their frequency in the subgroups that make up the population (Coolidge, 2006).

The DFO was then asked by the researcher to send a prepared and provided pre-notice e-mail to the selected participants indicating their selection for participation, why they had been selected, a brief description of the research study, and a request for their voluntary cooperation in completion of the survey (Appendix D). Four days later, a second e-mail contact was made by

the researcher to the participants in each state with directions about the on-line survey and a link to the survey site (Appendix E). The on-line survey format was chosen because of the respondents' access to the internet, for efficiency in data collection and also for the convenience of the participant. The e-mail included information about the research, the importance of the study, confidentiality, consent for the study, how the data would be utilized, and a requested response time. Five days after the delivery of the survey, a third contact was made, thanking those who had responded and reminding those who had not responded to do so in the next five working days (Appendix F). A final notice was sent 10 days later from the DFO encouraging those who had not yet completed the survey to do so (Appendix G). After the final collection of surveys, the researcher mailed a letter to the directors of each state Extension system thanking them for participation in the research study and offering to send the reported findings of the study to them upon completion.

Participant Demographics

Table 3-1 shows a summary of the demographics of the population studied. Of those who responded to the gender question 36% (n=132) were male and 64% (n=232) were female. The mean age was 35.5 years old. The respondents were asked to indicate the population of the area they were responsible for. Thirty-three percent (n=119) indicated a population of less than 20,000, 32% (n=117) indicated a population of greater than 80,000, while the remaining respondents 35% (n=129) fell in between a population of 20,000 and 80,000. Sixty-two percent of the respondents indicated an annual salary of less than \$40,000, and 23% made reported between \$40,001 and \$45,000. The remaining 15% reported annual salary of greater than \$45,000. The mean amount of time employed in their current job was 3.5 years. Respondents were asked to indicate the primary program area(s) that they were responsible for. Forty-two

percent of the respondents indicated a primary program area of 4-H youth development (4-H), 35% selected agriculture and natural resources (ANR), 21% selected family and consumer sciences (FCS), and 2% selected community viability (CV).

Table 3-1

Characteristics of Study Participants, Extension Agents in 12 Southern States

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Male	132	36.3
Female	232	63.7
Age		
20-25	37	10.5
26-30	112	31.6
31-35	56	15.8
36-40	60	17.0
41-45	27	7.6
Over 45	62	17.5
Tenure		
< 1 year	5	1.5
1-2 years	39	31.1
2-3 years	52	27.3
3-4 years	76	23.4
4-5 years	53	8.3
5-6 years	89	6.3
Salary		
< \$30,000	13	3.6
\$30,000-35,000	113	31.1
\$35,001-40,000	99	27.3
\$40,001-45,000	85	23.4
\$45,001-50,000	30	8.3
> \$50,000	23	6.3
Population Served		
< 20,000	119	32.6
20,001-40,000	72	19.7
40,001-60,000	31	8.5
60,001-80,000	26	7.1
>80,000	117	32.1
Program Area		
ANR	147	34.5
4-H	178	41.8
FCS	90	21.1
CV	11	2.6

Data Analysis

The Data was analyzed using the SPSS PASW Statistics 18 software package. The descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. Bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to identify the relationship between HR practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit. Finally, to explain newly hired Extension agents' intent to quit in terms of HR practices, regression analysis was conducted to show how the dependent variable can be predicted by the independent variables.

Correlational analysis. Correlations between the independent and dependent variables were analyzed to examine the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variables on an individual basis. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was used for this analysis. This correlation coefficient is represented by a value between -1 and 1. The closer, the coefficient is to either of the limits, the stronger the relationship between the two variables (Howell, 2007). The magnitudes of the correlations were described using terms and classification appropriate for the context of social science research. A correlation of .10 is described as a small effect size, a correlation of .30 is described as a medium effect size, and a correlation of .50 is described as a large effect size (Cohen, 1988). By using a standard such as Cohen's (1988), the relative strength of the correlation between variables can be reported with greater clarity.

Regression analysis. When looking at the correlation between multiple independent variables (HR practices, job satisfaction (JS), and organizational commitment (OC) and the dependent variable (intent to quit (IQ)), multiple regression methods were utilized. Keith (2006) states that "with multiple regression we can use multiple independent variables to explain

variation in a dependent variable” (p. 17). In an attempt to explain newly hired Extension agent’s intent to quit based upon HR practices, the researcher used multiple regression to build explanatory models.

The usefulness of regression models was evaluated by the coefficient of determination, denoted by R-Square (R^2). The coefficient of determination represents “the proportion of variance in either variable which is linearly accounted for by the other” (Cohen, 1988, p. 114). In the context of social science, researchers have provided general “rules of thumb” for interpreting the value of R^2 when there is no previous research to go on (Keith, 2006). An R^2 of .01 represents a small effect size, an R^2 of .09 represents a medium effect size, and an R^2 of .25 represents a large effect size (Cohen, 1988). This classification was applied in interpreting the coefficient of determination (R^2) in this study.

This study utilized block regression models to show the relation of groups of HR practices to employee intent to quit. Block entry allowed a combination of simultaneous and sequential regression. In simultaneous multiple regression, all of the independent variables are entered into the regression equation at the same time (Keith, 2007). In sequential multiple regression “the variables are entered into the regression equation one at a time, in some order determined in advance by the researcher” (Keith, 2007). Being unsure of the proper order of the variables, the researcher determined that block entry is the most appropriate method of analysis. With block regression, the researcher was able to evaluate the impact of incorporating sets of variables, rather than investigating variables individually. The block models investigated for employee intent to quit were as follows:

- Model 1: (Recruitment & Hiring) + (OC) + (JS) = (IQ)
- Model 2: (Benefits & Compensation) + (OC) + (JS) = (IQ)

- Model 3: (Training & Development) + (OC) + (JS) = (IQ)
- Model 4: (Evaluation & Supervision) + (OC) + (JS) = (IQ)
- Model 5: (All HR Practices) + (OC) + (JS) = (IQ)

Summary

This chapter described this research study in terms of the research design, the population of study, the instrumentation, and data analysis procedures. This was a descriptive study using correlational design to reveal relationships and explain employee intent to quit related to HR practices of Cooperative Extension in the Southern region of the United States. An on-line survey method was used by the researcher incorporating questions from the JSS and OCQ. The population was Extension agents from the 12 Southern region states who have been employed for less than six years. Procedures for data analysis applied in this study included descriptive statistics, correlational analysis, and multivariate regression. Findings from the statistical analyses will be presented in chapter 4.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of Human Resource practices on the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of new Extension agents as they relate to intent to quit. The study included four objectives:

1. Describe Extension agents' experience with human resource practices during the first five years of employment
2. Describe newly hired Extension agent's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to quit
3. Identify the relationship between human resource practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit
4. Explain newly hired Extension agent's intent to quit based upon human resource practices.

The final study population included 365 Extension agents from 12 states in the Southern United States. The respondents had been employed in their current position for less than six years. The response rate was 76%.

Objective 1: Describe Experiences with Human Resource Practices

The purpose of objective one was to describe the Extension agents' experience with human resource (HR) practices during the first five years of employment. Table 4-1 shows a summary of the frequency, means, and standard deviations of Extension agents' level of agreement with statements about various HR practices. The four categories utilized for HR practices included: recruitment & hiring (RH), training & development (TD), benefits &

compensation (BC), and evaluation & supervision (ES). The ratings are based on a scale of one to seven. For purposes of interpretation, ratings will be as follows: (1-1.5) strongly disagree, (1.6-2.5) moderately disagree, (2.6-3.5) slightly disagree, (3.6-4.5) neither agree nor disagree, (4.6-5.5) slightly agree, (5.6-6.5) moderately agree, and (6.6-7) strongly agree. A sample statement was “I receive professional development necessary for me to perform my job capably.”

Table 4-1

Extension Agents' Ratings on Statements Related to Human Resource Practices

Human Resource Category	n	M	SD
Recruitment and Hiring	363	4.8	1.43
My job interview provided a good preview of what I actually experience on the job	365	4.6	1.74
The actual requirements of my job accurately reflect my understanding of the job when I was first hired	363	4.8	1.68
Prior to my employment with Extension, I had several opportunities to observe the work of Extension	365	5.1	2.04
Training and Development	365	4.7	1.61
Upon employment with Extension, I was provided with the training necessary for success in my first year on the job	363	4.5	1.88
I receive professional development necessary for me to perform my job capably	364	5.3	2.10
Extension provided me with an effective mentoring and coaching experience as part of my training	365	4.3	1.93
Benefits and Compensation	365	4.3	1.44
I am compensated fairly for the work that I perform	365	3.8	1.93
Fringe benefits provided by Extension are competitive with those offered by other organizations	365	5.3	1.63
Extension provides work/life balance programs which are sufficient to help me manage my personal responsibilities	365	4.0	1.86
Evaluation and Supervision	365	4.8	1.51
My successes are recognized and acknowledged by my supervisor	364	5.0	1.82
The evaluation and performance management process provides meaningful feedback for me to be successful	365	4.4	1.85
I have a clear understanding of the promotion requirements for this job	364	5.1	1.78
Total	3.63	4.7	1.16

Note. Ratings based on statements that used a seven-point Likert-type scale: “Strongly Disagree” (1), “Moderately Disagree” (2), “Slightly Disagree” (3), “Neither Agree nor Disagree” (4), “Slightly Agree” (5), “Moderately Agree” (6), “Strongly Agree” (7). M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation.

In regard to recruitment and hiring, the participants' average level of agreement was 4.84, indicating slight agreement. The statement that received the highest level of agreement was "prior to my employment with Extension, I had several opportunities to observe the work of Extension" ($M=5.1$, $SD=2.04$). The statement with the lowest level of agreement was "my job interview provided a good preview of what I actually experience on the job" ($M=4.6$, $SD=1.74$).

For the training and development category, the participants' average level of agreement was 4.7, indicating slight agreement. The statement that received the highest level of agreement was "I receive professional development necessary for me to perform my job capably" ($M=5.3$, $SD=2.10$). The statement with the lowest level of agreement was "Extension provided me with an effective mentoring and coaching experience as part of my training" ($M=4.3$, $SD=1.93$).

The next HR category was benefits and compensation. The participants' average level of agreement in this category was 4.34, which aligns most closely with "neither agree nor disagree." The statement with the highest level of agreement was "fringe benefits provided by Extension are competitive with those offered by other organizations" ($M=5.3$, $SD=1.63$). The statement with the lowest level of agreement was "I am compensated fairly for the work that I perform" ($M=3.8$, $SD=1.93$).

For the final HR category of evaluation and supervision, the participants' average level of agreement was 4.81, indicating slight agreement. The statement with the highest level of agreement was "I have a clear understanding of the promotion requirements for this job" ($M=5.1$, $SD=1.78$). The statement with the lowest level of agreement was "the evaluation and performance management process provides meaningful feedback for me to be successful" ($M=4.4$, $SD=1.85$).

To further understand the ratings, the researcher analyzed the data by state of employment and length of tenure with the organization. Table 4-2 shows the breakdown by state in regard to perceptions of HR practices. Although the total population generally rated statements as “slightly agree,” some states’ participants’ ratings aligned more closely to the “neither agree nor disagree” rating. Two states in particular stood out from the rest in three of the four HR categories. State J, was consistently higher in RH ($M=5.4$, $SD=1.14$), TD ($M=5.8$, $SD=1.12$), and ES ($M=5.7$, $SD=1.36$), than the other 11 states. State L was consistently lower in RH ($M=4.3$, $SD=1.24$), TD ($M=3.3$, $SD = 1.51$), and ES ($M=3.5$, $SD=1.31$), than the other 11 states. Only in the BC category were the high and low scores from other states. State G was the highest in BC ($M=5.1$, $SD=1.06$), and state K was the lowest in BC ($M=3.5$, $SD=1.26$).

Table 4-2

State-level Summary of the Agreement Levels With Statements About Human Resource Practices

State	RH		TD		BC		ES		All HR	
	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)
A	29	4.9 (1.25)	29	4.6 (1.20)	29	3.7 (1.34)	29	4.6 (1.16)	29	4.4 (.73)
B	35	5.0 (1.21)	35	4.6 (1.74)	35	4.7 (1.53)	35	5.0 (1.18)	35	4.8 (1.10)
C	25	5.0 (1.63)	25	4.5 (1.82)	25	4.9 (1.27)	25	4.5 (1.89)	25	4.7 (1.37)
D	31	4.7 (1.52)	31	4.9 (1.35)	31	4.9 (1.34)	31	4.8 (1.24)	31	4.8 (1.02)
E	29	4.5 (1.49)	29	5.0 (1.56)	29	4.2 (1.68)	29	5.0 (1.73)	29	4.7 (1.31)
F	34	5.0 (1.56)	34	4.9 (1.70)	34	4.6 (1.19)	34	5.4 (1.26)	34	5.0 (1.18)
G	19	4.7 (1.62)	19	4.6 (1.81)	19	5.1 (1.06)	19	5.2 (1.31)	19	4.9 (1.03)
H	35	5.0 (1.45)	35	5.0 (1.44)	35	3.9 (1.34)	35	5.0 (1.26)	35	4.7 (1.02)
I	34	4.7 (1.58)	35	4.7 (1.62)	35	4.0 (1.53)	35	5.1 (1.48)	34	4.6 (1.20)
J	35	5.4 (1.14)	35	5.8 (1.12)	35	4.9 (1.14)	35	5.7 (1.36)	35	5.4 (.95)
K	30	4.5 (1.40)	31	4.0 (1.38)	31	3.5 (1.26)	31	3.7 (1.57)	30	3.9 (1.05)
L	27	4.3 (1.24)	27	3.3 (1.51)	27	4.0 (1.49)	27	3.5 (1.31)	27	3.8 (1.05)
Weighted	363	4.8 (1.43)	365	4.7 (1.61)	365	4.3 (1.44)	365	4.8 (1.51)	363	4.7 (1.16)

Note. Ratings based on statements that used a seven-point Likert-type scale: “Strongly Disagree” (1), “Moderately Disagree: (2), “Slightly Disagree” (3), “Neither Agree nor Disagree” (4), “Slightly Agree” (5), and “Moderately Agree” (6), “Strongly Agree” (7). RH=Recruitment and Hiring, TD= Training and Development, BC= Benefits and Compensation, ES=Evaluation and Supervision, All HR=Combined HR Responses. M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation.

The results indicated that the first two years of an employee's tenure are important.

Figure 4-1 shows that in the first two years, ratings for all HR practices are highest compared to subsequent years. Factors that may influence this are the inexperience that an employee has with the organizations HR practices since they are still in an introductory stage of employment. They may not have received salary adjustments, or a performance evaluation at this point in their career.

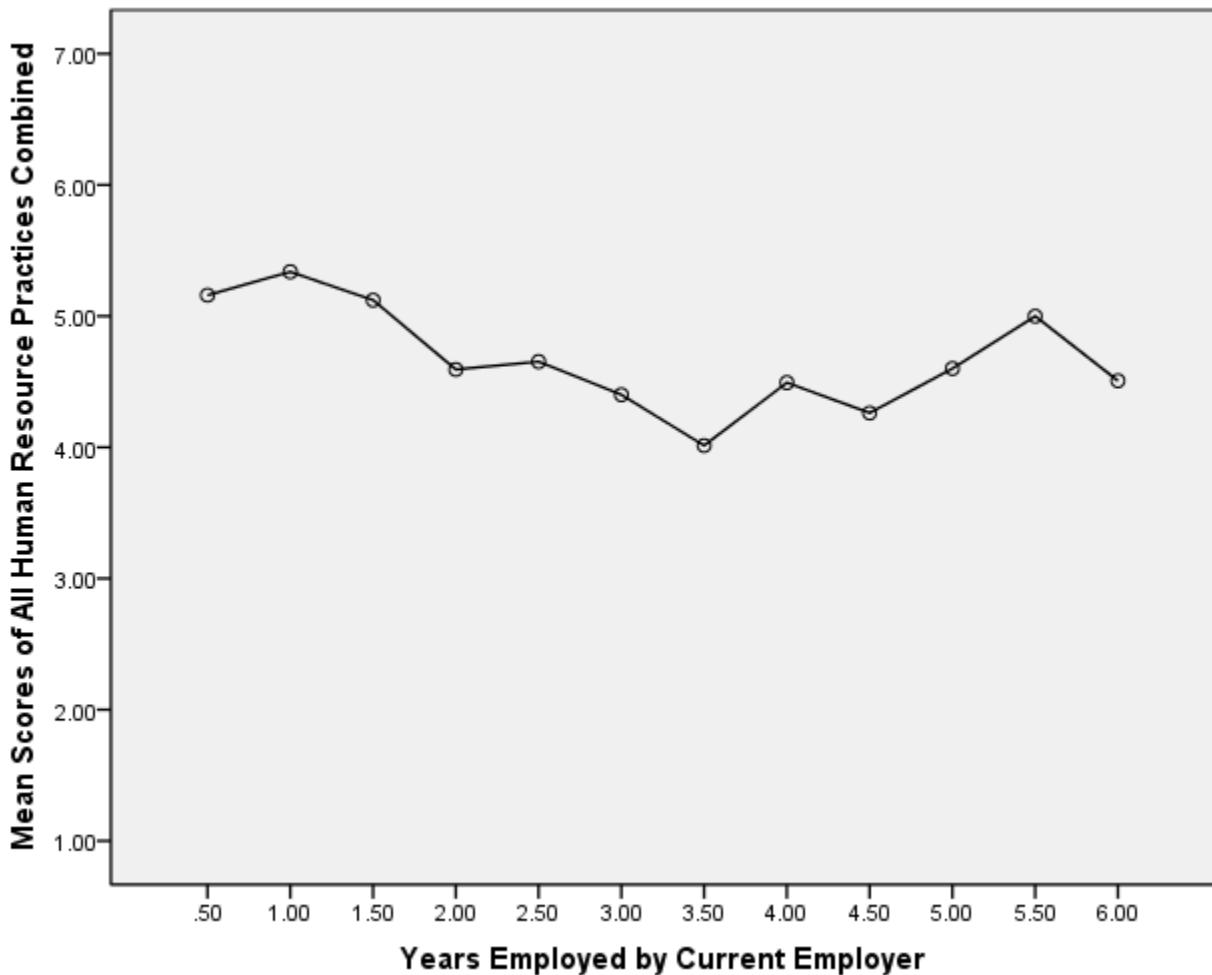


Figure 4-1. Analysis of Extension agents' attitudes toward Human Resource practices by years of employment. Scores for HR practices are based on a seven-point Likert-type scale: "Strongly Disagree" (1), "Moderately Disagree" (2), "Slightly Disagree" (3), "Neither Agree nor Disagree" (4), "Slightly Agree" (5), "Moderately Agree" (6), and "Strongly Agree" (7).

Table 4-3 shows a summary of the frequency, means and standard deviation of employees with less than 2 years of employment in comparison to those with greater than 2 years of employment to determine if tenure has influence on employee experience with HR practices. Employees with less than 2 years of employment showed slightly higher levels of agreement with all categories of HR practices. ANOVA tests show that the relationships between HR practices and employee tenure are significant as follows: RH ($F=9.638, p=.002$), TD ($F=19.481, p=.000$), BC ($F=14.914, p=.000$), and ES ($F=4.759, p=.030$). Benefits and compensation ranked the lowest among all HR practices with an overall ($M=4.3, SD=1.44$).

Table 4-3

Summary of the Agreement Levels with Human Resource Practices by Tenure

Years	N	RH	N	TD	N	BC	N	ES
Service		M(SD)		M(SD)		M(SD)		M(SD)
<=2 years	112	5.2(1.27)	113	5.2(1.34)	113	4.8(1.36)	113	5.1(1.36)
> 2 years	251	4.7(1.47)	252	4.4(1.66)	252	4.2(1.44)	252	4.7(1.56)
Weighted	363	4.8(1.43)	365	4.7(1.61)	365	4.3(1.44)	365	4.8(1.51)

Note. Ratings based on statements that used a seven-point Likert-type scale: “Strongly Disagree” (1), “Moderately Disagree: (2), “Slightly Disagree” (3), “Neither Agree nor Disagree” (4), “Slightly Agree” (5), and “Moderately Agree” (6), “Strongly Agree” (7). RH=Recruitment and Hiring, TD= Training and Development, BC= Benefits and Compensation, ES=Evaluation and Supervision, All HR=Combined HR Responses. M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation.

Objective 2: Describe Employee Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit

Objective 2 of the study was to describe newly hired Extension agents’ job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to quit. Three instruments were used to score these variables. To measure organizational commitment, the researcher used the 9-item short form of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), developed by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979). To measure job satisfaction the researcher used the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS)

developed by Spector (1985). To measure intent to quit (IQ), the researcher used a three-item instrument developed by Landau and Hammer (1986).

Extension agents responded to items on the questionnaire that evaluated their level of agreement with statements designed to measure job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit. Table 4-4 shows a summary of the scores organized by state along with a weighted score. Results show that IQ ratings overall fall within the slightly disagree range ($M=2.8, SD=1.77$). A low rating on the IQ indicates disagreement with intent to quit. State A showed the highest IQ rating ($M=3.7, SD=1.55$). The OCQ showed an overall score that was in the moderately agree range ($M=5.6, SD=1.12$). A high score on the OCQ indicates agreement with a commitment to the organization. State D ($M=6.0, SD=0.91$) and state G ($M=6.0, SD=0.87$) had the highest OCQ scores. Results of the JSS showed an overall score of ($M=4.6, SD=0.89$) indicating slight agreement. A high score on the JSS indicates agreement with job satisfaction. State D showed the highest score on the JSS ($M=5.2, SD=0.90$).

Table 4-4

Summary of Scores on the Intent to Quit, Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, and Job Satisfaction Survey Instruments based upon State

State	N	IQ	N	OCQ	N	JSS
		M(SD)		M(SD)		M(SD)
A	29	3.7 (1.55)	29	5.0 (1.13)	27	4.2 (.64)
B	35	2.0 (1.02)	35	5.7 (.90)	33	4.8 (.89)
C	25	2.6 (1.38)	25	5.8 (.93)	24	4.7 (.92)
D	31	1.9 (1.59)	31	6.0 (.91)	29	5.2 (.90)
E	29	2.8 (1.61)	29	5.6 (1.10)	28	4.6 (.92)
F	34	2.7 (1.79)	34	5.8 (.98)	31	4.8 (.75)
G	19	2.2 (1.60)	19	6.0 (.87)	18	4.8 (.79)
H	35	3.0 (2.00)	34	5.6 (.87)	33	4.6 (.76)
I	34	2.9 (2.06)	33	5.3 (1.52)	35	4.5 (1.02)
J	35	2.3 (1.82)	35	5.9 (1.12)	31	5.0 (.75)
K	31	3.6 (1.85)	30	5.3 (1.07)	28	4.1 (.85)
L	27	3.5(1.73)	27	4.9(1.33)	27	4.0(.80)
Weighted Total	365	2.8(1.77)	361	5.6(1.12)	344	4.6(.89)

Note. Ratings based on statements that used a seven-point Likert-type scale: “Strongly Disagree” (1), “Moderately Disagree: (2), “Slightly Disagree” (3), “Neither Agree nor Disagree” (4), “Slightly Agree” (5), and “Moderately Agree” (6), “Strongly Agree” (7). RH=Recruitment and Hiring, TD= Training and Development, BC= Benefits and Compensation, ES=Evaluation and Supervision, All HR=Combined HR Responses. M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation.

To further understand the ratings, the researcher analyzed the data by salary and length of tenure with the organization. Table 4-5 shows a summary of scores based upon salary levels of employees. A low score on the IQ indicates disagreement with intent to quit. A salary of less than \$30,000 showed the highest IQ score ($M=3.2$, $SD=1.62$). Salary levels of \$45,001-\$50,000 showed the lowest IQ score ($M=1.9$, $SD=1.36$). A high score on the OCQ indicates agreement with a commitment to the organization. A salary level of less than \$30,000 showed the highest OCQ ($M=6.0$, $SD=.66$). A high score on the JSS indicates agreement with job satisfaction. A salary level of \$45,001-\$50,000 showed the highest score on the JSS ($M=4.9$, $SD=.96$). Figure

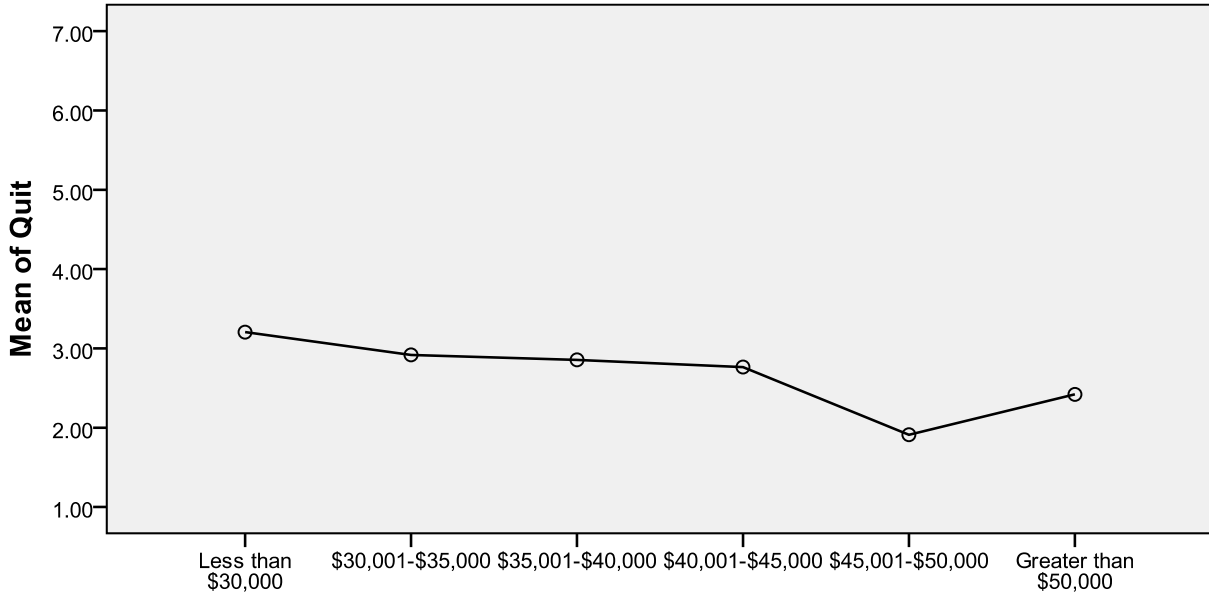
4-2 shows that after the \$40,000 salary level, there is a noticeable drop in the IQ score. Although the level of intent to quit does slightly increase at the greater than \$50,000 level, it is difficult to determine the trend without additional research.

Table 4-5

Summary of Scores on the Intent to Quit, Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, and Job Satisfaction Survey Instruments based upon Salary

Salary	N	IQ	N	OCQ	N	JSS
		M(SD)		M(SD)		M(SD)
Less than \$30,000	13	3.2(1.62)	13	6.0(.66)	12	4.2(.90)
\$30,001-\$35,000	113	2.9(1.84)	110	5.5(1.16)	103	4.6(.88)
\$35,001-\$40,000	99	2.9(1.75)	99	5.6(.99)	97	4.6(.85)
\$40,001-\$45,000	85	2.8(1.80)	84	5.6(1.14)	81	4.6(.93)
\$45,001-\$50,000	30	1.9(1.36)	30	5.8(1.33)	27	4.9(.96)
Greater than \$50,000	23	2.4(1.79)	23	5.4(1.21)	22	4.8(.84)
Weighted Total	363	2.8(1.77)	359	5.6(1.12)	342	4.6(.89)

Note. Ratings based on statements that used a seven-point Likert-type scale: “Strongly Disagree” (1), “Moderately Disagree: (2), “Slightly Disagree” (3), “Neither Agree nor Disagree” (4), “Slightly Agree” (5), and “Moderately Agree” (6), “Strongly Agree” (7). RH=Recruitment and Hiring, TD= Training and Development, BC= Benefits and Compensation, ES=Evaluation and Supervision, All HR=Combined HR Responses. M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation.



Please choose the answer that represents your current annual gross salary.

Figure 4-2. Analysis of Extension agents’ intent to quit based on annual salary. Level of Intent to Quit is based on a seven-point Likert-type scale: “Strongly Disagree” (1), “Moderately Disagree” (2), “Slightly Disagree” (3), “Neither Agree nor Disagree” (4), “Slightly Agree” (5), “Moderately Agree” (6), and “Strongly Agree” (7).

Figure 4-3 shows that the intent to quit increases slightly after two years of employment but then begins to level off. Table 4-6 shows a summary of scores based upon the tenure of employees divided by those with less than or equal to two years and those with greater than two years of employment. A low rating on the IQ indicates disagreement with intent to quit. Those employees with less than two years showed the lowest IQ rating ($M=2.3, SD=1.60$). ANOVA tests show significance at ($F=13.498, p=.000$). A high score on the OCQ indicates agreement with a commitment to the organization. Employees with less than two years scored highest on the OCQ ($M=5.9, SD=.94$). ANOVA tests show significance at ($F=13.856, p=.000$). A high score on the JSS indicates agreement with job satisfaction. Employees with less than two years showed the highest score on the JSS ($M=5.0, SD=.82$). ANOVA tests show significance at ($F=35.078, p=.000$).

Table 4-6

Summary of Scores on the Intent to Quit, Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, and Job Satisfaction Survey Instruments based upon Tenure

Tenure	N	IQ	N	OCQ	N	JSS
		M(SD)		M(SD)		M(SD)
<=2 Years	113	2.3(1.60)	112	5.9(.94)	109	5.0(.82)
>2 Years	252	3.0(1.81)	249	5.4(1.16)	235	4.4(.86)
All	365	2.8(1.77)	361	5.6(1.12)	344	4.6(.89)

Note. Ratings based on statements that used a seven-point Likert-type scale: “Strongly Disagree” (1), “Moderately Disagree: (2), “Slightly Disagree” (3), “Neither Agree nor Disagree” (4), “Slightly Agree” (5), and “Moderately Agree” (6), “Strongly Agree” (7). RH=Recruitment and Hiring, TD= Training and Development, BC= Benefits and Compensation, ES=Evaluation and Supervision, All HR=Combined HR Responses. M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation.

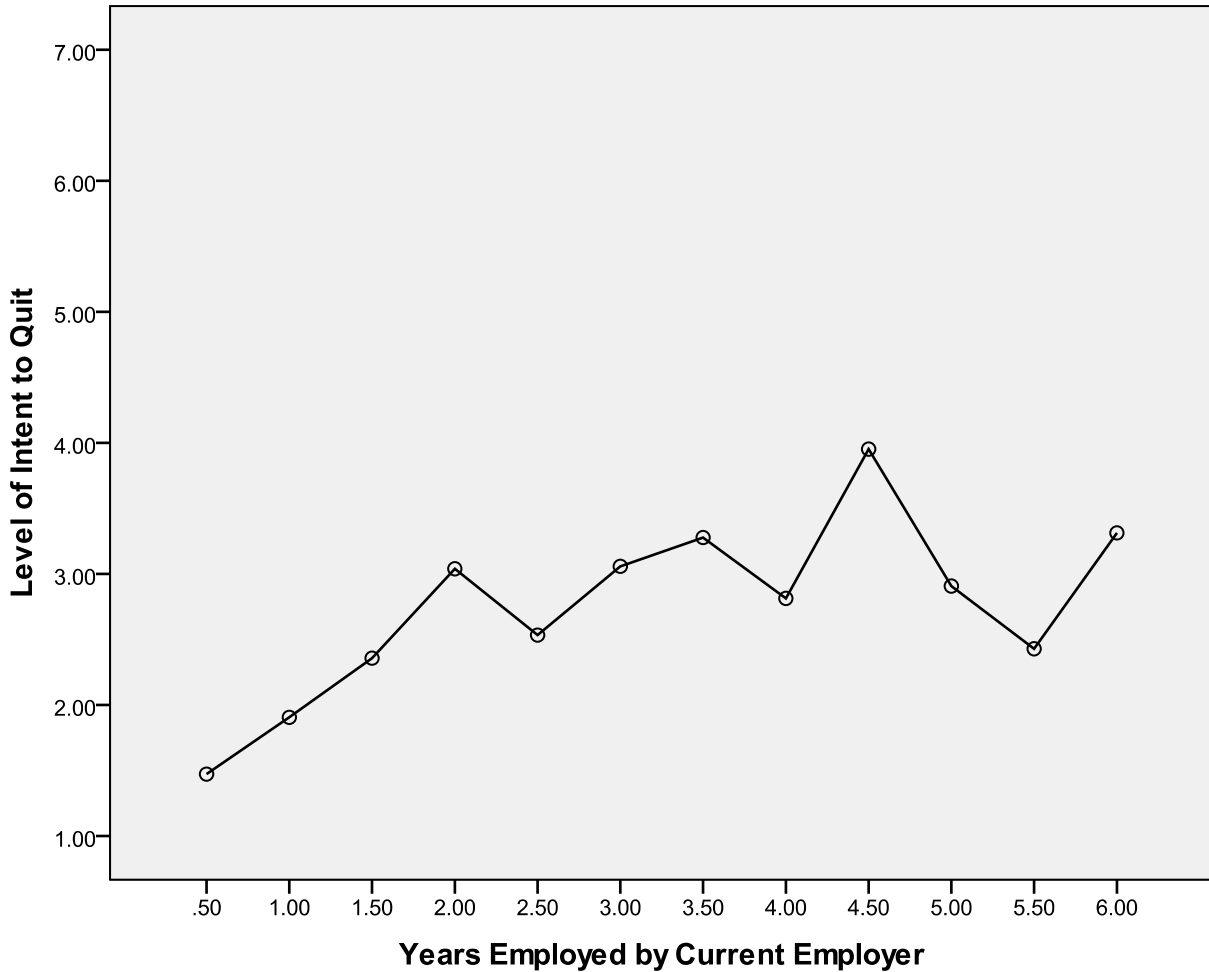


Figure 4-3. Analysis of Extension agents’ intent to quit based on years employed. Level of Intent to Quit is based on a seven-point Likert-type scale: “Strongly Disagree” (1), “Moderately Disagree” (2), “Slightly Disagree” (3), “Neither Agree nor Disagree” (4), “Slightly Agree” (5), “Moderately Agree” (6), and “Strongly Agree” (7).

Objective 3: Relationships between Human Resource Practices, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit

Objective three of the study was to identify the relationship between human resource practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit. Correlation analysis was utilized to determine any possible relationships. Table 4-7 shows correlations between variables. The researcher first looked at correlations between HR practices and job satisfaction.

The magnitudes of the correlations were described using terms and classification appropriate for the context of social science research. A correlation of .10 is described as a small effect size, a correlation of .30 is described as a medium effect size, and a correlation of .50 is described as a large effect size (Cohen, 1988). For interpretation purposes, “large effect size” will relate to “strong relationship” for example. Results show that there are strong and positive relationships between job satisfaction and training and development ($r=.620, p=.000$), benefits and compensation ($r=.673, p=.000$), and evaluation and supervision ($r=.712, p=.000$). In addition there is a moderate and positive relationship between job satisfaction and recruitment and hiring ($r=.476, p=.000$). When looking at organizational commitment, there are strong and positive relationships between benefits and compensation ($r=.573, p=.000$) and evaluation and supervision ($r=.561, p=.000$). Recruitment and hiring, as well as training and development have moderate relationships with organizational commitments. The dependant variable of this study is intent to quit. It is notable that benefits and compensation ($r=-.516, p=.000$) is the only HR variable that has a strong and negative relationship with intent to quit. The other three HR variables, RH ($r=-.310, p=.000$), TD ($r=-.394, p=.000$), and ES ($r=-.413, p=.000$) all have moderate and negative relationships with intent to quit.

Table 4-7

Pearson's Product Moment Correlations for Extension Agents Perceptions of Human Resource Practices and Attitudes on Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit

	Pearson Correlation Coefficients: <i>r</i>							
	RH	TD	BC	ES	All HR	JS	OC	IQ
Recruitment and Hiring (RH)	1							
Training and Development (TD)	.530*	1						
Benefits and Compensation (BC)	.363*	.410*	1					
Evaluation and Supervision (ES)	.372*	.579*	.522*	1				
ALL Human Resource Practices (All HR)	.725*	.828*	.735*	.804*	1			
Job Satisfaction (JS)	.476*	.620*	.673*	.712*	.806*	1		
Organizational Commitment (OC)	.355*	.492*	.573*	.561*	.638*	.717*	1	
Intent to Quit (IQ)	-.310*	-.394*	-.516*	-.413*	-.529*	-.619*	-.652*	1

**p* < .05

Figure 4-4 shows the conceptual model first introduced in chapter 1 with correlations between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Correlation analysis of the research data shows a strong and positive relationship between all HR practices and job satisfaction ($r=.806, p=.000$) and all HR practices and organizational commitment ($r=.638, p=.000$). There is also a strong and positive relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment ($r=.717, p=.000$). In support of the conceptual model, the data also showed a strong and negative relationship between job satisfaction and intent to quit ($r=-.619, p=.000$) and also between organizational commitment and intent to quit ($r=-.652, p=.000$).



Figure 4-4. Conceptual Model showing correlations between human resource practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intent to quit. Arrows do not imply causality, merely a correlation. Note: All correlations were significant at $p \leq .001$.

Objective 4: Explain Extension Agents' Intent to Quit Based Upon Human Resource Practices

Objective four was to explain newly hired Extension agent's intent to quit based upon human resource (HR) practices. The regression models included in Table 4-8 were used to determine how groupings of HR practices influenced the intent to quit of the newly hired employees. Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction were both included in each model as variables based upon the conceptual model introduced in chapter one and redisplayed with correlations in Figure 4-4. Using block regression, HR practices were added to the model to determine possible relationships.

The first model, which used recruitment and hiring as the independent variable, had an adjusted R-square (coefficient of determination) of .471 indicating that 47% of the variance in intent to quit was explained in the model. The parameter estimates for organizational commitment ($\beta = -.436, p = .000$), and job satisfaction ($\beta = -.315, p = .000$) are both negative and significant. The addition of the recruitment and hiring variable to the model was not significant. Model two shows similar results to model one. The adjusted R-square remains strong at .475, however, the benefits and compensation variable made very little change in the percent of variance explained. Model three follows suit with model one and two. The adjusted R-square stayed strong at .471, however the training and development variable made very little change in the percent of variance explained. Model four continued the trend with models one, two and three. The adjusted R-square continued to be strong at .474, but the evaluation and supervision variable again, made very little change in the percent of variance explained. In the fifth model, all HR practices were included in the regression model to determine their predictive value of

intent to quit. Although the adjusted R-square for model five was strong a .475, the model holds true with organizational commitment ($\beta=-.426, p=.000$) and job satisfaction ($\beta=-.318, p=.000$) being the only variables that were significant.

Table 4-8

Standardized Regression Models for Intent to Quit: Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Intent to Quit Based Upon Human Resource Practices

Source	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Est.	α	Est.	α	Est.	α	Est.	α	Est.	α
Adjusted R-Square	.471		.475		.471		.474		.475	
F-Statistic	101.5	.000	103.2	.000	101.5	.000	102.9	.000	2.86	.091
Organizational Commitment	-.436	.000	-.419	.000	-.437	.000	-.444	.000	-.426	.000
Job Satisfaction	-.315	.000	-.257	.000	-.316	.000	-.364	.000	-.318	.000
Recruitment and Hiring	.018	.682							.026	.581
Benefits and Compensation			-.091	.093					-.098	.072
Training and Development					.015	.764			-.021	.714
Evaluation and Supervision							.088	.117	.099	.091

Since the five models tested showed that job satisfaction and organizational commitment were significant contributors to intent to quit in each model, but no HR practices contributed significantly to intention to quit, the researcher determined decided to test a model that did not include job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This model would show if HR practices were significant contributors to intent to quit by themselves. Table 4-9 shows that model 3, which used HR practices as the independent variables, had an adjusted R-square (coefficient of determination) of .310 indicating that 31% of the variance in intent to quit was explained in the model. The parameter estimates for benefits and compensation ($\beta=-.466, p=.000$), and training and development ($\beta=-.173, p=.008$) were two HR practices that were both negative and significant.

Table 4-9

Standardized Regression Models for Intent to Quit: Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Intent to Quit Based Upon Human Resource Practices

Source	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Est.	α	Est.	α	Est.	α
Adjusted R-Square	.472		.475		.310	
F-Statistic	152.6	.000	2.86	.091	41.7	.000
Organizational Commitment	-.681	.000	-.426	.000		
Job Satisfaction	-.599	.000	-.318	.000		
Recruitment and Hiring			.026	.581	-.061	.346
Benefits and Compensation			-.098	.072	-.466	.000
Training and Development			-.021	.714	-.173	.008
Evaluation and Supervision			.099	.091	-.123	.071

In addition, the researcher determined that other factors should be considered in regression models to see if factors such as job characteristics or demographics had any significant influence on intent to quit. To determine which independent variables provided the greatest contribution toward intent to quit, stepwise regression was used to include all of the variables shown in figure 4-5. The reduced regression model included job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and salary as the independent variables and had an adjusted R-square of .482, indicating that 48% of the variance related to intent to quit was explained by these three variables (Table 4-10). The parameter estimates for job satisfaction ($\beta = -.290, p = .000$), organizational commitment ($\beta = -.446, p = .000$), and salary ($\beta = -.105, p = .009$) all indicated a significant negative relationship with intent to quit.

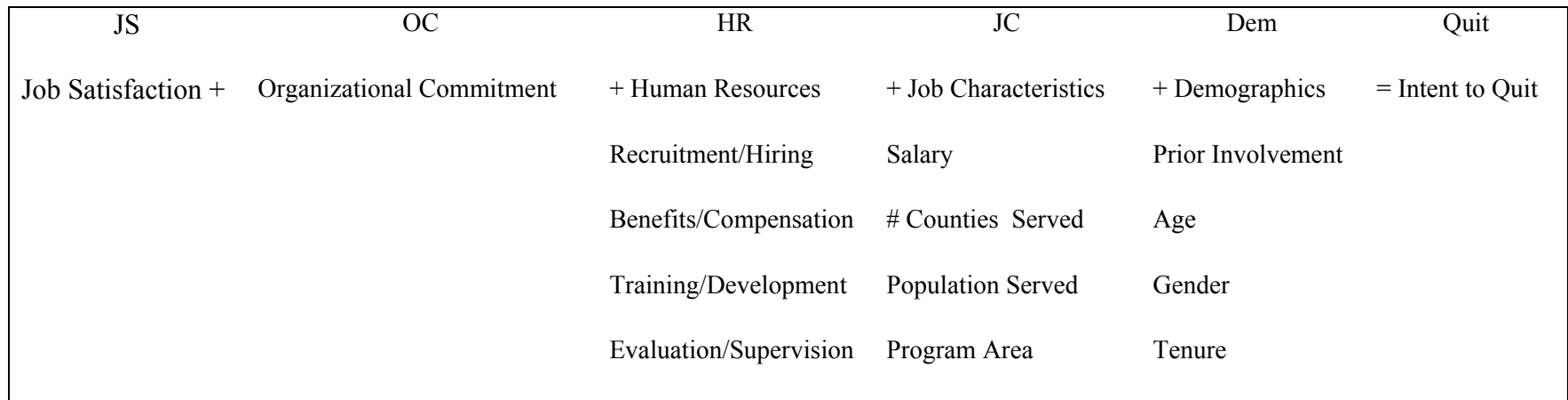


Figure 4-5. Conceptual Model for Intent to Quit

Table 4-10

Reduced Regression Model for Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Intent to Quit

Source	Est.	α
Adjusted R-Square	.482	
F-Statistic	105.4	.000
Job Satisfaction	-.290	.000
Organizational Commitment	-.446	.000
Salary	-.105	.009

Based upon the conceptual model in Figure 4-4, organizational commitment is influenced by human resource practices and job satisfaction. To show which independent variables had the greatest contribution to the organizational commitment of employees, stepwise regression was used to include all of the variables shown in Figure 4-6. The reduced regression model included job satisfaction, evaluation and supervision, and tenure as the independent variables and had an adjusted R-square of .514, indicating that 51% of the variance related to organizational commitment was explained by these three variables (Table 4-11). The parameter estimates for job satisfaction ($\beta = .658, p = .000$), evaluation and supervision ($\beta = .012, p = .757$), and tenure ($\beta = .088, p = .109$) were not all significant, but together they produced the model with the greatest contribution to organizational commitment.

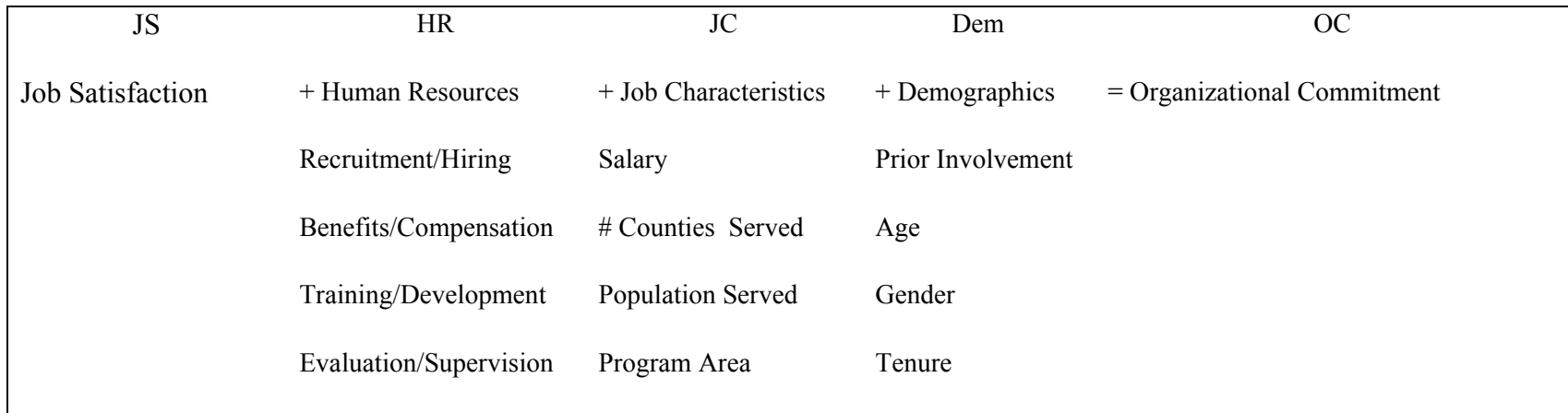


Figure 4-6. Conceptual Model for Organizational Commitment

Table 4-11

Reduced Regression Model for Organizational Commitment: Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Organizational Commitment

Source	Model 1	
	Est.	α
Adjusted R-Square	.514	
F-Statistic	120.5	.000
Job Satisfaction	.658	.000
Evaluation and Supervision	.012	.757
Tenure	.088	.109

Acknowledging job satisfaction as a possible mediating variable for organizational commitment that cannot be directly influenced, the researcher conducted another stepwise regression model that excluded job satisfaction from the analysis. The analysis included all of the variables shown in Figure 4-7. The reduced regression model included benefits and compensation, evaluation and supervision, and tenure as the independent variables and had an adjusted R-square of .425, indicating and 42% of the variance related to organizational commitment was explained by these three variables (Table 4-12). The parameter estimates for benefits and compensation ($\beta=.360, p=.000$), evaluation and supervision ($\beta=.371, p=.000$), and tenure ($\beta=-.079, p=.054$) were all significant, and produced the model with the greatest contribution to organizational commitment when job satisfaction is treated as an unknown variable.

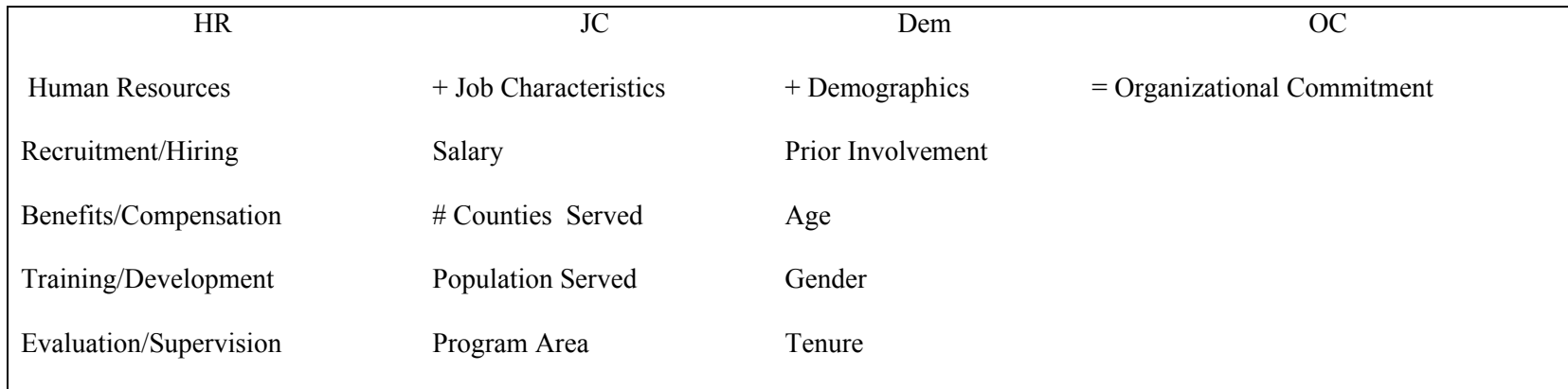


Figure 4-7: Conceptual Model for Organizational Commitment

Table 4-12

Reduced Regression Model for Organizational Commitment: Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Organizational Commitment

Source	Model 1	
	Est.	α
Adjusted R-Square	.425	
F-Statistic	89.7	.000
Benefits/ Compensation	.360	.000
Evaluation/Supervision	.371	.000
Tenure	-.079	.054

The conceptual model in Figure 4-4 also indicates that job satisfaction and organizational commitment are both influenced by human resource practices. To show which independent variables had the greatest contribution to the job satisfaction of employees, stepwise regression was used to include all of the variables shown in Figure 4-8. The reduced regression model included recruitment and hiring, evaluation and supervision, benefits and compensation, tenure, and age as the independent variables and had an adjusted R-square of .675, indicating that 67% of the variance related to job satisfaction was explained by these five variables (Table 4-13). The parameter estimates recruitment and hiring ($\beta = .168, p = .000$), evaluation and supervision ($\beta = .449, p = .000$), benefits and compensation ($\beta = .334, p = .000$), tenure ($\beta = -.174, p = .000$), and age ($\beta = .074, p = .024$) were all significant, and produced the model with the greatest contribution to job satisfaction.

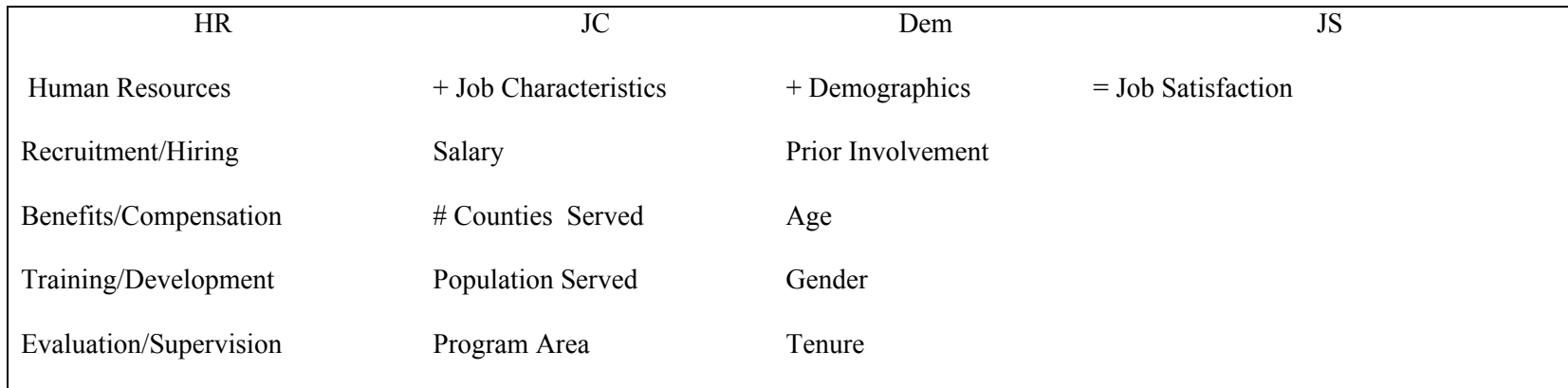


Figure 4-8. Conceptual Model for Job Satisfaction

Table 4-13

Reduced Regression Model for Job Satisfaction: Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Job Satisfaction

Source	Model 1	
	Est.	α
Adjusted R-Square		.675
F-Statistic	139.1	.000
Recruitment/Hiring	.168	.000
Benefits/ Compensation	.334	.000
Evaluation/Supervision	.449	.000
Tenure	-.174	.000
Age	.074	.024

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study. Findings were organized and presented by the following objectives:

1. Describe Extension agents' experience with HR practices during the first five years of employment;
2. Describe newly hired Extension agents' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to quit;
3. Identify the relationship between HR practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit; and
4. Explain newly hired Extension agents' intent to quit based upon HR practices.

Additional analysis of the conceptual model in Figure 4-4 was conducted to determine if there were significant relationships between certain independent variables, such as job characteristics and demographics, and the mediating variables of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Chapter 5 offers a more detailed discussion of the study's findings, including conclusions drawn from the findings. In addition, chapter five will provide recommendations for using HR practices to minimize undesirable voluntary turnover and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This final chapter of the dissertation includes an overview of the problem being studied, the methodology used in the study, and the findings of the research. Implications of the study are identified and recommendations for application and further research are discussed.

Statement of Problem

Employee turnover is a cause for concern when the best and brightest employees are leaving your organization for another, especially when there may be something that you could do to retain those employees. Turnover is costly for organizations. Direct costs such as recruitment, selection, and training of new employees, as well as indirect costs, such as stress on remaining workers, reduced productivity, and low morale for organizations, can cost as much as two year's pay and benefits (Ramlall, 2005).

Managing turnover is important in many occupations, but the impact of turnover is more evident in professional fields of work like Cooperative Extension where the organization is dependent on knowledge workers. Knowledge workers produce and distribute ideas and information rather than goods or services (Serrat, 2008). They are highly educated and skilled and therefore, are difficult to replace when they quit. A problem that Virginia Extension has faced over the past few years is the turnover of Associate Extension Agents prior to promotion to Extension Agent. For continued employment, this promotion is mandatory by the sixth year of employment. Total voluntary turnover rates (excluding retirements) for the past three years have ranged from 6.5% to 10.8% (Figure 5-1). What is more concerning, however, is the report of those with less than six years of employment who voluntarily left Virginia Cooperative

Extension. This group has included turnover rates of 14.1% to 20.2% over the past three years (M. Christian, personal communication, August 21, 2010).

Table 5-1

Turnover Rates for Virginia Cooperative Extension Agents

Year	Voluntary Turnover Rate	
	All Employees Pre-retirement	Employees of Less than Six Years
2009	6.5%	14.1%
2008	9.4%	15.8%
2007	10.8%	20.2%

Note. Data from personal communication with M. Christian, September 9, 2010.

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of human resource (HR) practices on the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of new Extension agents as they relate to intent to quit. This study focused on Extension Agents with less than six years of employment and included four objectives: 1) to describe Extension agents’ experience with HR practices during the first six years of employment, 2) to describe newly hired Extension agents’ job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to quit, 3) to identify the relationship between HR practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit, and 4) to explain newly hired Extension agent’s intent to quit based upon HR practices.

Review of Methodology

This study included a stratified sample of 480 Extension Agents from the Southern Region of the United States, who had less than six years of employment. The Southern region

consists of 13 states including: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (ASRED, 2010). Twelve states participated in the study. Each state either provided the researcher with a listing of their employees who met the criteria, or sent the survey information directly to the participants. Random samples of 40 Extension agents per state were selected for participation in the study.

A fifty-one question web-based Likert-type scale questionnaire was used for the study. (Appendix A) The instrument was developed by combining questions from existing instruments. To measure organizational commitment, the researcher used the 9-item short form of Mowday, Steers, and Porters' (1979) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). Reliability for these nine items using Cronbach's alpha was .914. To measure job satisfaction, the researcher used Spector's (1985) Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS). Of the original 36 items, 18 were included in the survey in an effort to limit the length of the survey instrument and decrease respondent fatigue. Reliability for these 18 items using Cronbach's alpha was .848. To measure intent to quit, the researcher used three items developed by Landau and Hammer (1986). Reliability for these three items using Cronbach's alpha was .910. To determine demographics and also to describe Extension agents' experiences with HR practices during their first five years of employment, 12 closed-ended questions and four open-ended questions were asked. (Appendix B) HR practices were divided into four categories. Cronbach's alpha for each of the four categories were: recruitment and hiring (.682), training and development (.825), compensation and benefits (.711), and supervision and evaluation (.775). These four categories are common to the HR literature (Huselid, 1995). Each of the four categories consisted of three questions for a total of 12 questions. Chronbach's alpha for all 12 HR questions as a group was .866.

To maximize the response rate, the director of each state's Extension program was contacted by mail with a letter from the director of Extension in Virginia, notifying them of the research and encouraging their participation. (Appendix C) A follow-up communication by the researcher to each state's director asked for their participation and also for a listing of e-mail of employees from their state with less than six years of employment. A pre-notice was sent to selected participants by their respective directors, alerting them to be expecting the survey and encouraging their participation. (Appendix D) Reminders and thank you notes were sent and incentive prizes were utilized to increase the response rate. (Appendices E,F, G) Three hundred ninety Extension agents responded to the questionnaire within 30 days of the initial notice for a response rate of 81%. The final usable responses included 365 Extension agents for a response rate of 76%. The Data was analyzed using the SPSS PASW Statistics 18 software package. No causation is implied in this research. Although the findings are not generalizable to states beyond the study population, extrapolations based upon the findings are appropriate. Extrapolation allows the researcher to make "modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions" (Patton, 2008, p.459).

Summary of Findings

Objective 1: Describe Experiences with Human Resource Practices

The first objective was to describe Extension agents' experience with HR practices during the first five years of employment. The purpose of this objective was to determine how new employees view their organizations' efforts to meet their expectations as related to HR practices. Employee attitudes toward HR practices were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale where 1= "strongly disagree" and 7= "strongly agree" and were organized in four major

categories: 1) Recruitment and Hiring (RH), 2) Training and Development (TD), 3) Benefits and Compensation (BC), and 4) Evaluation and Supervision (ES). Utilizing the paired samples T-test, BC was found to be significantly different from all other major HR categories. In addition, the researcher investigated the impact that state of employment and employment tenure had on attitudes toward HR practices. For all questions in the HR categories, employee attitudes were only slightly positive with an average mean of 4.7.

When HR practices were analyzed by state, some states scored consistently better than others, which seemed to indicate that new employees in those states are more positive about their situation and that those states may have a better grasp on HR practices that work well. However, even the highest scoring state had an average mean of only 5.4, indicating that there is still room for improvement (Figure 5-1).

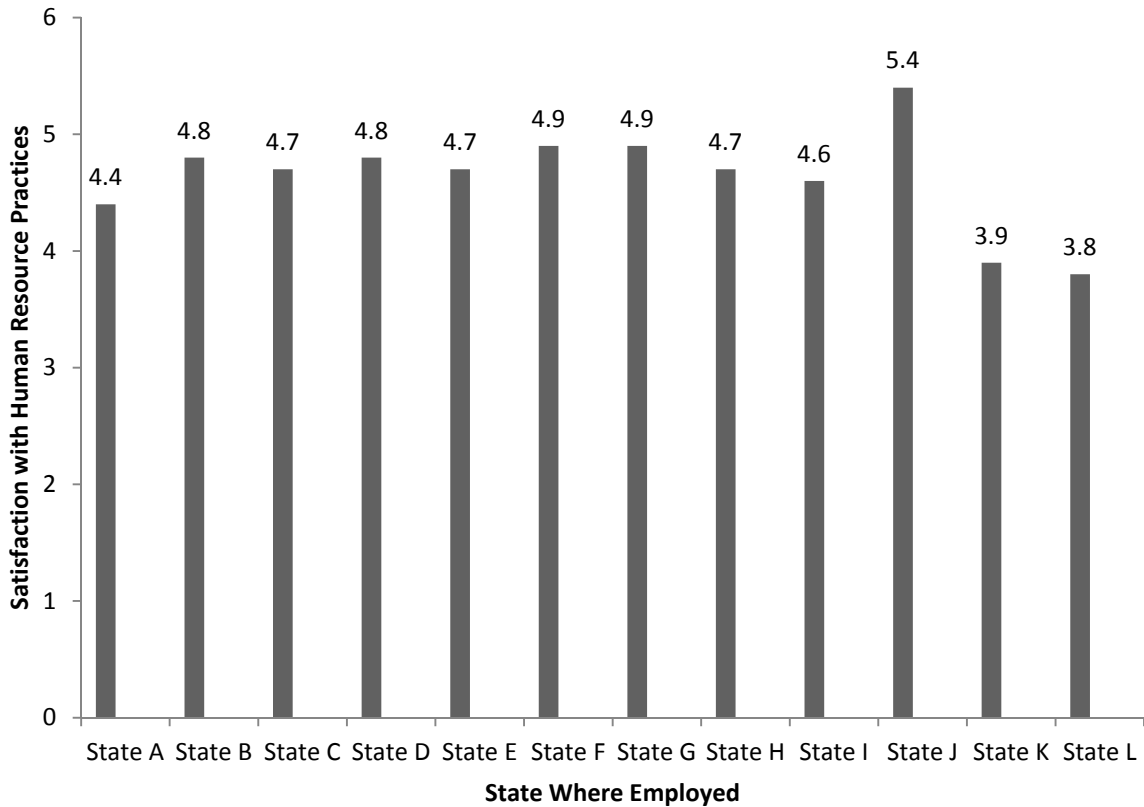


Figure 5-1. Analysis of Extension agents’ perceptions of human resource practices by state. Satisfaction levels are based on a seven-point Likert-type scale: “Strongly Disagree” (1), “Moderately Disagree” (2), “Slightly Disagree” (3), “Neither Agree nor Disagree” (4), “Slightly Agree” (5), “Moderately Agree” (6), and “Strongly Agree” (7). The twelve states included in the study are identified with a CollectorID letter in no particular order.

As part of the survey, respondents were given an opportunity to share comments that explain their responses and employment experiences with Extension. State J, which had the highest mean score ($M=5.4$, $SD=.95$) of the 12 states in regard to the perception of employees toward HR practices generated some useful comments for the study. One respondent stated:

As with any job, there are positives and negatives - I am content that I have a job in this economic state. I am also grateful for the flexibility and fringe benefits of working in Extension, i.e. leaving the office for lunch, Employee Education Program as well as my states’ double match retirement. I took to heart the message shared in new agent training

of "you are in control of your own work schedule...if you're too busy, it's because you scheduled it." I try to maintain a healthy balance. But our office is also having some tension/communication issues right now...and that is affecting the work environment...as the support staff coordinator it is my responsibility to address and it is impacting my programming...that is, the amount of time I am spending to improve staff relations.

Another employee from that state wrote; "I love helping clients better their lives, and that to me, is the best satisfaction in being an Extension Agent!"

The states with the two lowest mean scores in regard to employee perceptions of HR practices were state K ($M=3.9$, $SD=1.05$) and state L ($M=3.8$, $SD=1.05$). Comments from respondents of those states included:

My hope for the long term viability of this organization is slim to none. Many years of poor leadership and a resistance to change from within extension has severely impacted the organization. Everything happening now to reorganize and increase efficiencies as well as to redirect program areas is too little too late. Also, Extension salaries need to reflect the level of education that we bring to the table.

Another employee wrote:

Constant pressure related to diminishing State support for Extension program will end up driving me out of this job. Aside from salary, job security is the number one goal for me in a tenuous economy. Constantly fighting for support of Extension and the anxiety related to job security is enough to make me want to leave the organization.

Another employee wrote:

Extension trains many new employees and allows them to earn a Master's degree at no cost to the employee. Often times, once the employee has earned their Masters, they get offered a job with a higher salary somewhere else and the employee leaves Extension. If the pay was more competitive, these employees would be more likely to stay. However, as it is Extension trains their employees to do a good job and invest a lot of time and money in their professional development just to lose them to someone that is willing to pay them competitively according to their level of education and experience. So the University is ultimately losing money by doing this when they could up the pay and not have to train someone new, pay their tuition, and lose productivity in between employees.

Finally, tenure was analyzed in regard to differences in perspective between Extension employees and HR practices. Overall, employees with less than or equal to two years of employment had an average satisfaction rating of 5.1, while those employees with greater than two years of employment had an average satisfaction rating of 4.5 (Figure 5-2). These numbers indicate that new employees are more satisfied with their situation in regard to HR practices in the first couple of years, than after two years. Regardless of what influences the perspective, the scores are still relatively low throughout employees' tenure.

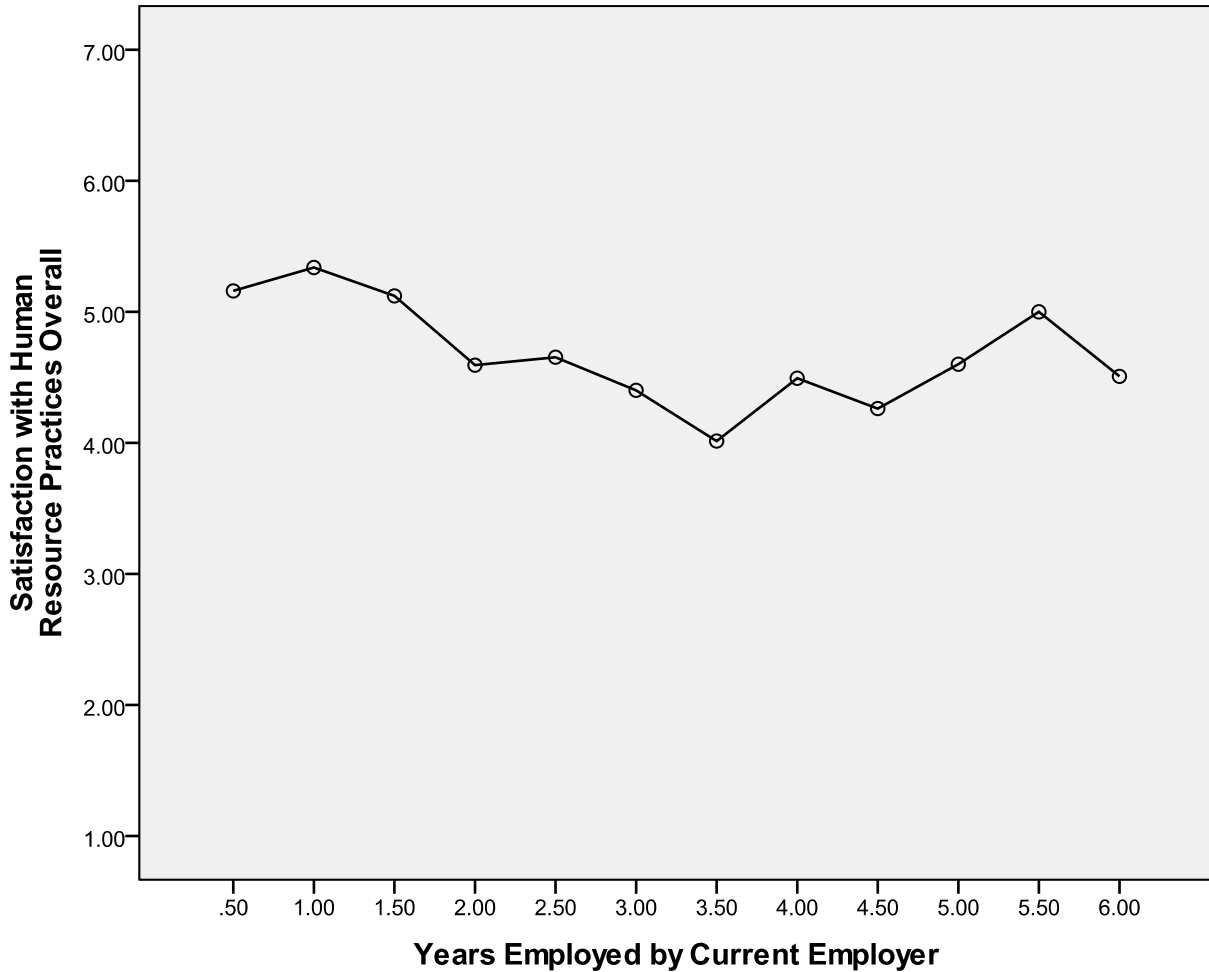


Figure 5-2 Analysis of Extension agents’ perceptions of human resource practices by tenure. Satisfaction ratings are based on a seven-point Likert-type scale: “Strongly Disagree” (1), “Moderately Disagree” (2), “Slightly Disagree” (3), “Neither Agree nor Disagree” (4), “Slightly Agree” (5), “Moderately Agree” (6), and “Strongly Agree” (7).

Objective 2: Describe Employee Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit

The second objective was to describe newly hired Extension agents’ job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to quit. A high score on the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) and the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) instruments indicate high levels of satisfaction and commitment. A high score on the Intent to Quit (IQ) construct indicates a

desire to leave the organization. A seven point Likert-type scale was used where 1= “strongly disagree” and 7= “strongly agree”. Weighted mean scores showed that among all participants, the IQ score was 2.8, the JSS score was 4.6, and the OCQ score was 5.6. Extension Agents appear to be slightly or moderately in disagreement with their intent to quit. The Agents seem to be only slightly satisfied with their jobs, but are moderately in agreement that they are committed to the organization.

Results for this objective were also analyzed using the variables of salary and tenure. Key highlights from this analysis suggest that salary levels may be related to IQ rating. Salary levels in the \$45,001-\$50,000 range provided the lowest score on intent to quit at 1.9 and also the highest score on JSS of 4.9. Interestingly, the lowest salary level category of less than \$30,000 provided the highest score on OCQ, indicating that a high salary does not necessarily improve the organizational commitment of the Extension agent. When tenure was included in the analysis, Extension agents who had been employed for less than two years showed the most favorable scores on all three instruments.

Objective 3: Relationships between Human Resource Practices, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit

The third objective was to identify the relationship between HR practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit. Particularly, since IQ was the dependant variable, it was important to see how the other variables influenced IQ. Bivariate correlation analysis was used to analyze the data for this objective. Findings showed significant positive relationships between HR practices of TD, BC, ES and job satisfaction. The HR practices of BC and ES had strong and positive relationships with organizational commitment. For the dependant variable of IQ, BC showed the strongest negative relationship among all of the

HR practices suggesting that is an important variable in the decision making process of Extension agents to leave their organization. Overall, it is important to note that when considering the conceptual model presented in Figure 5-3, HR practices have strong positive correlations with both job satisfaction ($r=.806, p=.000$) and organizational commitment ($r=.638, p=.000$). Job satisfaction also has a strong positive relationship to organizational commitment ($r=.717, p=.000$).

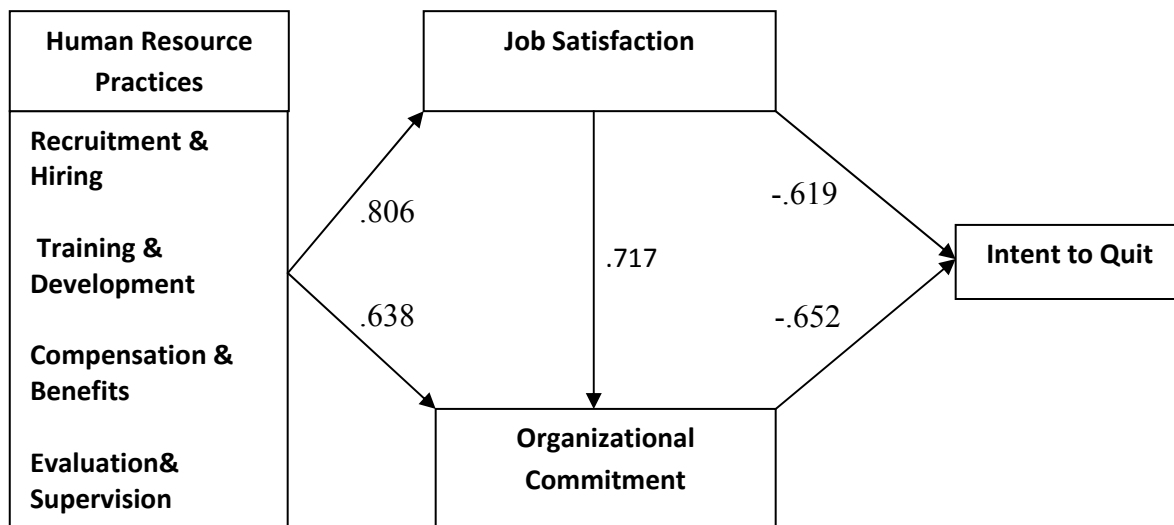


Figure 5-3: Conceptual Model showing correlations between human resource practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intent to quit. Arrows do not imply causality, merely a correlation. Note: All correlations were significant at $p \leq .001$.

Ultimately, this study sought to determine what variables have the greatest influence on employee intent to quit. Correlation analysis presented in the previous chapter indicate that although all HR practices together have a strong negative relationship with IQ ($r=-.529, p=.000$), the strongest relationships are between JS ($r=-.619, p=.000$) and OC ($r=-.652, p=.000$) with the

strongest predictor of intent to quit being organizational commitment. This analysis is consistent with the literature.

Objective 4: Explain Extension Agents' Intent to Quit Based Upon Human Resource Practices

The fourth objective was to explain newly hired Extension agents' intent to quit based upon HR practices. This was the most important objective of the study in that its purpose was to identify which HR practices have the greatest influence on a new employees' intention to quit and gives the researcher some insight into what organizations can do to minimize voluntary turnover. Regression analysis was conducted so that the researcher could consider multiple independent variables and interactions to explain variation in the dependant variable (intent to quit).

Five regression models were analyzed using HR practices, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction as independent variables, and intent to quit as the dependant variable. A summary of these models is found in Table 5-1. Using multiple regression, categories of HR practices were entered. Each of the five models included both organizational commitment and job satisfaction as variables. The first four models added one major HR component at a time. The fifth model included all four HR components. Recruitment and Hiring, Benefits and Compensation, Training and Development, and Evaluation and Supervision all failed to significantly contribute to IQ when JSS and OCQ were included in the model. Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction were both significant variables in all of the models. Approximately 47% of the variance in the dependant variable was explained within each of the models.

Table 5-2

Standardized Regression Models for Intent to Quit: Explaining Newly Hired Agents' Intent to Quit Based Upon Human Resource Practices

Source	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Est.	α	Est.	α	Est.	α	Est.	α	Est.	α
Adjusted R-Square	.471		.475		.471		.474		.475	
F-Statistic	101.5	.000	103.2	.000	101.5	.000	102.9	.000	2.86	.091
Organizational Commitment	-.436	.000	-.419	.000	-.437	.000	-.444	.000	-.426	.000
Job Satisfaction	-.315	.000	-.257	.000	-.316	.000	-.364	.000	-.318	.000
Recruitment and Hiring	.018	.682							.026	.581
Benefits and Compensation			-.091	.093					-.098	.072
Training and Development					.015	.764			-.021	.714
Evaluation and Supervision							.088	.117	.099	.091

Since the regression models showed no HR practices that contributed significantly to intent to quit, other variables including job characteristics and demographics were investigated. Using stepwise regression, all of the variables were entered into the model. The reduced regression model showed that the only significant variable in addition to job satisfaction and organizational commitment was salary.

Figure 5-3 shows a strong, negative correlation between intent to quit and job satisfaction ($r=-.619, p=.000$) as well as organizational commitment ($r=-.652, p=.000$). To determine which HR practices and other variables had significant influence on organizational commitment, separate from job satisfaction, stepwise regression was used. The reduced regression model showed that two HR practices, benefits and compensation, and evaluation and supervision, both contributed to employee organizational commitment along with tenure, producing an adjusted R-square of .425, indicating that 42% of the variance in organizational commitment can be explained by these three variables.

To determine which HR practices, job characteristics and demographics had significant influence on job satisfaction, the variables were entered into a stepwise regression model. The reduced regression model showed that three HR practices, recruitment and hiring, benefits and compensation, evaluation and supervision, along with tenure and age, contributed to employee job satisfaction. This model produced an adjusted R-square of .675, indicating that 67% of the variance in job satisfaction can be explained by these five variables.

Discussion of Results

Interpretation of Findings

Based upon findings from the four research objectives, the following conclusions are offered.

Objective 1: Describe Experiences with Human Resource Practices

Benefits and compensation are significantly less favorable among agents than other major HR categories.

The one HR category that stood out from the others was benefits and compensation. Because of this, special attention should be given when determining fair compensation for work performed. The statement in the BC category that had the lowest overall mean score was regarding fair compensation for work performed. The score for this question was 3.8, indicating that respondents were slightly unfavorable about their compensation situation. In a previous study, agents that low pay was a reason why they left Extension (Rousan & Henderson, 1996). Additionally, the statement in the BC category regarding benefits had a score of 5.3, which was among the highest of all scores for HR questions. This indicates that respondents are favorable about the benefits received through employment with Extension. Therefore, it appears that agents have the strongest opinions about BC compared to the other HR categories.

New employees are most satisfied with their HR experiences in their first two years of employment.

When comparisons of responses to HR question were considered by tenure, employees with ≤ 2 years of employment produced a higher mean score ($M=5.1$, $SD=1.33$) than employees with >2 years of employment ($M=4.5$, $SD=1.53$). ANOVA tests show that the relationships between HR practices and employee tenure are significant as follows: RH ($F=9.638$, $p=.002$), TD

($F=19.481$, $p=.000$), BC ($F=14.914$, $p=.000$), and ES ($F=4.759$, $p=.030$). This finding could be attributed to many internal or external variables but generally shows that there tends to be a honeymoon period where employees are more satisfied. In a previous study, it was found that job satisfaction decreases until an individual changes jobs, then the level of satisfaction increases when they start a new job (Boswell, Boudreau, and Tichy, 2011). Gradually, after the novelty wears off, the satisfaction tapers off and then eventually begins to decrease again. Implications are that continued attention to HR practices for employees throughout their early years of employment are important considerations.

Objective 2: Describe Employee Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit.

Extension agents are only slightly satisfied with their jobs.

Overall, Extension agents' mean score for job satisfaction was only slightly positive ($M=4.6$, $SD=0.89$). Job satisfaction has a strong negative correlation with intent to quit ($r=-.619$, $p=.000$). Extension organizations should give attention to factors that improve job satisfaction in order to minimize the intent to quit of their new employees. Statements considered in the Job Satisfaction Survey included: "I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do", "I like doing the things I do at work", and "when I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive". In a study of Extension agent burnout, Ensle (2005) found that agents were "moderately satisfied with their jobs, their colleagues, and with CES as an organization".

Extension agents are committed to Extension as an organization.

The overall mean score for organizational commitment for Extension agents was moderately strong for the response group ($M=5.6$, $SD=1.12$), indicating that new Extension employees are generally committed to the organization that they are working for. This is encouraging for

administrators as organizational commitment generated the highest negative correlation with intent to quit ($r=-.652, p=.000$). Implications of this finding are that many of the employees being hired as Extension agents believe in the purpose and mission of the organization and feel positive about being affiliated with the organization as an employee. Allen and Meyer (1996) defined organizational commitment as a psychological link between the employee and the employing organization that makes it less likely that the employee will voluntarily leave the organization. Examples of statements from the organizational commitment questionnaire included: “I talk up this organization to my friends as a great place to work for”, “this organization really inspires the very best in me in regard to job performance”, and “I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful”.

Salary level may influence an employee’s intent to quit.

Findings of the study show that the salary range of \$45,001-\$50,000 per year produced the lowest score for employee intent to quit ($M=1.9, SD=1.36$) indicating that salary levels in this range may be related to lower levels of intent to quit. Interestingly, the salary levels of less than \$30,000 up to \$45,000 provided the highest average mean score for employee intent to quit ($M=2.9, SD=1.75$). Implications are that once the employee reaches a salary level of \$45,000, their intent to quit is reduced. Rousan and Henderson (1996) found that low pay was a reason that Extension agents left the organization. It should be noted that salary level alone is not a sufficient measure of intent to quit and must be considered in addition to other HR factors.

Extension agents are more likely to consider quitting after their first two years of employment.

Extension organizations should pay special attention to meeting new employee needs in their initial years of employment. Findings show that new employees give less consideration to quitting in their first two years ($M=2.3$, $SD=1.60$) than they do after two years on the job ($M=3.0$, $SD=1.81$). HR practices influencing work conditions, placement, training, compensation, and supervision should be monitored to maximize the match of the employee for the position they were hired for. When employees perceive that the organization is committed to them and supportive of them, their trust in and commitment to the organization are stronger (Whitener, 2001).

Objective 3: Relationships between Human Resource Practices, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intent to Quit

HR practices are strongly related to an employee's job satisfaction and their commitment to the organization.

Correlation analysis showed that there was a significant positive relationship between HR practices and job satisfaction ($r=.806$, $p=.000$). This finding indicates that the more positive an employee's feelings are about the HR practices of the organization, the more satisfied they will be with their job situation. Correlation analysis also showed that there was a significant positive relationship between HR practices and the organizational commitment of the employee ($r=.638$, $p=.000$). This finding, as with the previous finding, indicates that the more positive an employee's feelings are about the HR practices of the organization, the more committed they will be to the organization. In an exchange where the organization shows commitment to the employee, the employee may in turn show commitment to the organization. This type of exchange is known as perceived organizational support and was designed to explain the

development of employee commitment to an organization (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986).

Job satisfaction and organizational commitment are related to an employee's intent to quit.

Correlational analysis conducted in this study showed a strong and negative relationship between job satisfaction and intent to quit ($r=-.619, p=.000$). This finding indicates that the more satisfied the employee is with their job, the lower their intent to quit. Correlational analysis also produced a strong and negative relationship between organizational commitment and intent to quit ($r=-.652, p=.000$). This finding indicates that the more committed an employee is to their organization, the less likely their intent to quit. “Most empirical studies of organizational commitment have focused on affective commitment. This is because affective commitment is the strongest and most consistent predictor of organizationally desired outcomes such as employee retention” (Mohamed, Taylor, & Hassan, 2006). These findings are both well supported in the related literature (Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978, Lee & Mitchell, 1994, Steers & Mowday, 1981, Price & Mueller, 1981, Mowday, Koberg, & McArthur, 1984, Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008, Vandenberghe & Tremblay, 2008, Allen & Meyer, 1996).

Objective 4: Explain Extension Agents' Intent to Quit Based Upon Human Resource Practices

HR practices are significant predictors of employee intent to quit.

Regression analysis was used to determine the significance of HR practices on intent to quit.

Results showed that in each of the regression models used for this objective, groupings of HR

practices produced a significant contribution to intent to quit ($F=41.737, p=.000$). Two HR practices produced individual significance in the model. The two were BC ($\beta=-.310, p=.000$) and TD ($\beta= -.157, p=.008$). Therefore, HR practices are worth additional consideration as a factor impacting employee intent to quit. Pay satisfaction has been associated with increased organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and greater intent to stay in the position (Farrell & Rusbult, 1981, Lum, Kervin, Clark, Reid, & Sirola, 1998). Benefits have also been shown to have a strong correlation with turnover (Shaw, Delery, Jenkins, & Gupta, 1998).

Organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and salary are significant contributors to employee intent to quit.

The five prescribed regression models for objective four all showed that HR practices were fully mediated by organizational commitment and job satisfaction in regard to intent to quit. The researcher used stepwise regression to determine if there were other factors such as job characteristics or demographics that had any significant influence on intent to quit and were not fully mediated by organizational commitment and job satisfaction. The reduced regression model showed that salary level of employees was a significant contributor to intent to quit ($\beta=-.105, p=.009$). This finding is supported in the Currall, Towler, Judge, and Kohn (2005) study of public school teachers, showing that pay satisfaction is significantly associated with intent to quit. Since public school teachers are knowledge workers, like Extension agents, the relationship makes sense.

Recruitment and hiring, benefits and compensation, evaluation and supervision, tenure and age are significant contributors to job satisfaction.

The conceptual model presented in Figure 5-3 shows that there is a significant relationship between HR practices and job satisfaction. To determine which variables best explain job

satisfaction, the researcher used stepwise regression to investigate the independent variables, including HR practices, job characteristics, and demographics. Results showed that recruitment and hiring, benefits and compensation, evaluation and supervision, tenure, and age were all significant contributors to job satisfaction. This is consistent with findings by Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth (1978) that age and tenure had a direct effect on job satisfaction. They found that intention to search for a job was stronger when job satisfaction was lower, and when the employee was younger and less tenured.

Benefits and compensation, evaluation and supervision, and tenure are significant contributors to organizational commitment.

The conceptual model in Figure 5-3 also showed a significant relationship between HR practices and organizational commitment. Excluding job satisfaction, the researcher used stepwise regression to create a reduced model which included HR practices, job characteristics and demographics. The reduced model showed that benefits and compensation, evaluation and supervision, and tenure were the most significant contributors to organizational commitment, when job satisfaction was not included as a variable. Interestingly, in this study, training and development did not appear as a significant HR practice in the reduced models in regard to influencing job satisfaction or organizational commitment. Previous studies had shown that issues contributing to agent turnover included lack of strong and consistent training (Strong & Harder, 2009).

Recommendations for Practice

Based upon the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher recommends the following to Extension organizations wishing to limit occurrences of unwanted voluntary turnover of Extension Agents:

1. Extension administration should investigate options for better meeting the salary expectations of agents. It is evident from this research that salary has an important influence on the job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and also the intent to quit of newly hired Extension Agents. Fair compensation for work performed is an area that employers should give more attention.
2. Extension organizations should strive to offer employees opportunities to increase their salary quickly in the first six years through implementing multiple levels of promotion in the early years. Emergent workers are not any less loyal than traditional workers, but organizations need to understand that they are looking for opportunities for growth and development. Salary and compensation can be a part of this plan for growth. Allowing employees to reach the \$45,000 annual salary range in the first six years, may contribute to reduced levels of attrition by voluntary turnover.
3. Extension organizations should develop a clear and realistic employee performance plan for the initial years of employment. The organization can begin this process during the recruitment and hiring phase by providing realistic job previews and internships to potential employees. This would be a good way for prospective employees to gain practical experience and perspective of the career choice prior to making the commitment. This is particularly important since employees are most satisfied with their HR experiences in their first two years on the job, but they are also more likely to quit after the first two years.
4. Since job satisfaction and organizational commitment are the best predictors of employee intent to quit, organizations should conduct formal assessments of their employees during the first six years of employment to measure success in providing an employment

environment that promotes jobs satisfaction and organizational commitment. This may provide information useful for analyzing and modifying HR practices that will help to improve where there are deficiencies in employee perception of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

5. Findings indicate that since job satisfaction is a strong predictor of intent to quit, organizations should consider giving attention to recruitment and hiring, benefits and compensation, evaluation and supervision, tenure, and age as they seek to improve the job satisfaction of employees in the organization.
6. Since the states included in the study produced differing results in the perceptions of their employees toward HR practices, administration should share experiences and best practices with each other to improve the satisfaction and commitment of their employees, and reduce their intent to quit.
7. Emergent workers desire regular skill development and support. Retention efforts can be similar to those used for retaining volunteers. Extension educators and administrators should seek volunteer resources and literature on retaining volunteers that they may apply to their new employees through resources such as the Everyone Ready program (<http://energizeinc.com/everyoneready/>) which is available to Extension employees through 4-H (<http://nextgeneration.4-h.org/volunteerism/>).

Suggestions for Additional Research

1. The study should be replicated in the other parts of the country to see if the results are consistent. This study was limited to 12 states in the Southern United States. The findings are not generalizable, and there may be some regional differences from the respondents. Such potential differences should be explored.

2. Research on the job satisfaction and organizational development of new Extension agents, should be conducted by program of expertise. Since the demands of work are somewhat different for 4-H Agents, Agriculture Agents, and Family and Consumer Science Agents, this type of research could provide ideas for HR personnel on custom designing training programs and expectations.
3. A replication study should be conducted when the economy improves to see if results would differ as employment conditions change and options become more readily available. This study was conducted in a time when the national economic conditions were not favorable, unemployment was hovering at 10 percent, and pay increases for government employees were minimal or non-existent.
4. Social Exchange Theory, would be a good basis for additional study with Extension Agents to determine if job satisfaction and organizational commitment are influenced by the perceived level of commitment from the organization to the employee. Perceived organizational support has been associated with intention to quit. Research conducted in this area should explore the commitment of the organization to the employee as perceived from the employees' perspective.
5. Benefits and compensation should be explored in regard to the direct influence on intent to quit of newly hired employees. This research indicated that there was a significant relationship, but additional research in regard to the influence of salary levels on intent to quit should be explored.

References

- Allen, N.J. & Meyer, J.P. (1996). Affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization: An examination of construct validity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 49(3), 252-276.
- Allen, D.G., Shore, L.M., & Griffeth, R.W. (2003). The role of perceived organizational support and supportive human resource practices in the turnover process. *Journal of Management*, 29(1), 99-118.
- Arnold, S. & Place, N. (2010). Influences of agricultural agent's decisions to remain in an extension career. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 51(2), 36-45.
- Arthur, J.B. (1994). Effects of human resource systems on manufacturing performance and turnover. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(3), 670-687.
- Association of Southern Region Extension Directors (ASRED). (2010). *Members by state*. Retrieved from http://asred.msstate.edu/directory/members_state.html
- Barber, A.E. & Bretz, R.D., Jr. (2000). *Compensation in organizations: Current research and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bateman, T.S. & Strasser, S. (1984). A longitudinal analysis of the antecedents of organizational commitment. *Academy of Management*, 27(1), 95-112.
- Berger, L.A. & Berger, D.R. (2004). *The talent management handbook*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Bergiel, E.B., Nguyen, V.Q., Clenny, B.F., & Taylor, G.S. (2009). Human resource practices, job embeddedness and intention to quit. *Management Resource News*, 32(3), 205-219.
- Blau, P.M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. New York, NY: Wiley.

- Boswell, W., Boudreau, J.W., & Tichy, J. (2011). *The Relationship Between Employee Job Change and Job Satisfaction: The Honeymoon-Hangover Effect*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Brace, I. (2004). *Questionnaire design: How to plan, structure and write survey material for effective market research*. London, England: Market Research in Practice Series
- Brudney, J.L. & Meijs, L.C.P.M. (2009). It ain't natural: Toward a new (natural) resource conceptualization for volunteer management. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 38(4), 564-581.
- Carter, C.G. (1989, November). *Factors related to organizational turnover intentions of Louisiana cooperative extension service agents*. Paper presented at the annual conference on quality-of-life studies in marketing and management, Blacksburg, VA.
- Chandler, G.D. (2004). Organizational and individual factors related to retention of county Extension agents employed by Texas Cooperative Extension. *Dissertation Abstracts International*. 65(12), 4432A. (UMI No. 3157047)
- Cherrington, D.J. (1989). *Organizational behavior*. Needham Heights, MA.: Allyn & Bacon.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Coolidge, F.L. (2006). *Statistics: A gentle introduction* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Currall, S.C., Towler, A.J., Judge, T.A., & Kohn, L. (2005). Pay satisfaction and organizational outcomes. *Personnel Psychology*, 58(3), 613-640.
- Curry, J.P., Wakefield, D.S, Price, J.L., & Mueller, C.W. (1986). On the causal ordering of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. *Academy of Management*, 29(4), 847-858.

- Dess, G.G., & Shaw, J.D. (2001). Voluntary turnover, social capital, and organizational performance. *Academy of Management Review*, 26(3), 446-456.
- Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchinson, S., & Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71(3), 500-507.
- Enslie, K.M. (2005). Burnout: How does extension balance job and family? *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 43(3) Article 3FEA5. Available at: <http://joe.org/joe/2005june/a5.php>
- Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) Leadership Advisory Council. (2005). *2005 report*. Retrieved from: <http://www.aplu.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=1078>
- Farrell, D., & Rusbult, C.E. (1981). Exchange variables as predictors of job satisfaction, job commitment, and turnover: The impact of rewards, costs, alternatives, and investments. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 28(1), 78-95.
- Frank, F., Finnegan, R., & Taylor, C. (2004). The Race for Talent: Retaining and Engaging Workers in the 21st Century. *Human Resource Planning*, 27(3), 12-26.
- Gaertner, K.N., & Nollen, S.D. (1989). Career experiences, perceptions of employment practices, and psychological commitment to the organization. *Human Relations*, 42(11), 975-991.
- Glatthorn, A.A. & Joyner, R.L. (2005). *Writing the winning thesis or dissertation* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Gouldner, A.W. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review*, 25(2), 161-178.
- Griffith, R.W. & Hom, P.W. (2001). *Retaining valued employees*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Guzzo, R.A., Noonan, K.A., & Elron, E. (1994). Expatriate managers and the psychological contract. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79(4), 617-626.

- Harding, K. (2000, July). Understanding Emerging Workforce Trends. *DesignIntelligence*. Retrieved from <http://www.di.net/articles/archive/2086>
- Holtom, B.C., Mitchell, T.R., Lee, T.W., & Eberly, M.B. (2008). Turnover and retention research: A glance at the past, a closer review of the present, and a venture into the future. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 2(1), 231-274.
- Howell, D.C. (2007). *Statistical methods for psychology* (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thompson Wadsworth.
- Hurley, L. (2010). The positive side of employee turnover. Retrieved from: <http://www.helium.com/items/670241-the-positive-side-of-employee-turnover>
- Huselid, M.A. (1995). The impact of human resource management practices on turnover, productivity, and corporate financial performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(3), 635-672.
- Israel, G.D. (2009). *Determining sample size* (Publication No. PEOD6). University of Florida IFAS Extension. Retrieved from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/PD/PD00600.pdf>
- Jones, G.R. & Wright, P.M. (1992). An economic approach to conceptualizing the utility of human resource management practices. In K. Rowland & G. Ferris (Eds.), *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, 10, 271-299.
- Kaye, B. & Jordan-Evans, S. (2005). *Love'em or lose'em*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Keith, T.Z. (2006). *Multiple regression and beyond*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Kutilek, L.M. (2000). Learning from those who leave. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 38(3) Article 3IAW2. Available at: <http://joe.org/joe/2000june/iw2.html>
- Landau, J. & Hammer, T.H. (1986). Clerical employees' perceptions of intraorganizational career opportunities. *Academy of Management*, 29(2), 385-404.

- Latham, G.P. (2007). *Work motivation: History, theory, research, and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lee, T.H., Gerhart, B., Weller, I., Trevor, C.O. (2008). Understanding voluntary turnover: Path-specific job satisfaction effects and the importance of unsolicited job offers. *Academy of Management Journal*, 51(4), 651-671.
- Lee, T.W. & Mitchell, T.R. (1994). An alternative approach: The unfolding model of voluntary employee turnover. *Academy of Management Review*, 19(1), 51-89.
- Lee, T.W., Mitchell, T.R., Holtom, B.C., McDaniel, L.S., & Hill, J.W. (1999). The unfolding model of voluntary turnover: A replication and extension. *Academy of Management Journal*, 42(4), 450-462.
- Lum, L., Kervin, J., Clark, K., Reid, F., & Sirola, W. (1998). Explaining nursing turnover intent: Job satisfaction, pay satisfaction, or organizational commitment? *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 19(3), 305-320.
- Maertz, C.P.Jr. & Campion, M.A. (2004). Profiles in quitting: Integrating process and content turnover theory. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(4), 566-582.
- Marcus, B. (2010). The positive side of employee turnover. Retrieved from: <http://www.helium.com/items/668500-the-positive-side-of-employee-turnover>
- March, J.G. & Simon, H.A. (1958). *Organizations*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- McKeown, E. (2010, March) Retention in the Upswing, *Training and Development*, 22.
- Meyer, J.P. & Allen, N.J., (1991). A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment. *Human Resource Management Review*, 1(1), 61-89.

- Meyer, J.P. & Allen, N.J., & Smith, C.A. (1993). Commitment to organizations and occupations: Extension and test of a three-component conceptualization. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 78*(4), 538-551.
- Meyer, J.P. & Allen, N.J. (1997). *Commitment in the workplace*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Michaels, C.E. & Spector, P.E. (1982). Causes of employee turnover: A test of the Mobley, Griffith, Hand, and Meglino Model. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 67*(1), 53-59.
- Mitchell, T.R., Holtom, B.C., Lee, T.W., & Graske, T. (2001). How to keep your best employees: Developing an effective retention policy. *The Academy of Management Executive, 15*(4), 96-107.
- Mobley, W.H. (1977). Intermediate linkages in the relationship between job satisfaction and employee turnover. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 62*(2), 237-240.
- Mobley, W.H., Griffeth, R.W., Hand, H.H., & Meglino, B.M. (1979). Review and conceptual analysis of the employee turnover process. *Psychological Bulletin, 86*(3), 493-522.
- Mobley, W.H., Horner, S.O., & Hollingsworth, A.T. (1978). An evaluation of precursors of hospital employee turnover. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 63*(4), 408-414.
- Mohamed, F., Taylor, G.S., & Hassan, A. (2006). Affective commitment and intent to quit: The impact of work and non-work related issues. *Journal of Managerial Issues, 18*(4), 512-529.
- Morse, G.W. (2009). *The Minnesota response: Cooperative extension's money and mission crisis*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse.
- Mowday, R.T., Koberg, C.S., & McArthur, A.W. (1984). The psychology of the withdrawal process: A cross-validated test of mobley's intermediate linkages model of turnover in two samples. *Academy of Management Journal, 27*(1), 79-94.

- Mowday, R.T., Steers, R.M., & Porter, L.W., (1979). The measurement of organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 14(2), 224-247.
- Mueller, C.W., Boyer, E.M., Price, J.L., & Iverson, R.D. (1994). Employee attachment and noncoercive conditions of work. *Work and Occupations*, 21(2), 179-212.
- Mushrush, W. (2002,May). Reducing employee turnover. *Missouri Small Business Development and Technology Center*. Retrieved from:
http://www.missouribusiness.net/sbt/dc/docs/reducing_employee_turnover.asp
- Nobscot Corporation. (2006). *Latest BLS employee turnover rates for year ending august, 2006 – Released October 11, 2006*. Retrieved from <http://www.nobscot.com/survey/index.cfm>
- Patton, M.Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation*.(4th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Peters, J. & Jarvis, P. (Eds.). (1991). *Adult education: Evolution and achievement in developing field of study*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Pinder, C.C. (2008). *Work motivation in organizational behavior*. (2nd Ed.). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Porter, L.W. & Steers, R.M. (1991). *Motivation and work behavior*. (5th Ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Porter, L., Steers, R., Mowday, R., & Boulian, P. (1974). Organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover among psychiatric technicians. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 59(5), 603-609.
- Price, J.L. & Mueller, C.W. (1981). A causal model of turnover for nurses. *Academy of Management Journal*, 24(3), 543-565.

- Ramlall, S. (2004, September). A review of employee motivation theories and their implications for employee retention within organizations. *Journal of American Academy of Business*, 5(1), 52-63.
- Reichers, A.E., (1985). A review and reconceptualization of organizational commitment. *The Academy of Management Review*, 10(3), 465-476.
- Robbins, S.P. & Judge, T.A. (2007). *Organizational behavior*. (12th Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Robertson, I.T., Iles, P.A., Gratton, L., & Sharpley, D. (1991). The impact of personnel selection and assessment methods on candidates. *Human Relations*, 44(9), 963-982.
- Rousan, L.M., & Henderson, J.L. (1996). Agent turnover in Ohio State University extension. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 37(2), 56-62.
- Safrit, R.D. & Owen, M.B. (2010). A conceptual model for retaining county extension program professionals. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 48(2) Article 2FEA2. Available at: http://www.joe.org/joe/2010april/pdf/JOE_v48_2a2.pdf
- Scott, M., Swortzel, K.A., & Taylor, W.N. (2005). Extension agents' perceptions of fundamental job characteristics and their level of job satisfaction. *Journal of Southern Agricultural Education Research*, 55(1), 88-101.
- Seevers, B., Graham, D., Gamon, J., & Conklin, N. (1997). *Education through cooperative extension*. New York, NY: Delmar.
- Serrat, O. (2008). *Managing knowledge workers*. Retrieved from <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Information/Knowledge-Solutions/Managing-Knowledge-Workers.pdf>

- Shaw, J.D., Delery, J.E., Jenkins, G.D. Jr., & Gupta, N. (1998). An organization-level analysis of voluntary and involuntary turnover. *Academy of Management Journal*, 41(5), 511-525.
- Steel, R.P. & Ovalle, N.K. (1984). A review and meta-analysis of research on the relationship between behavioral intentions and employee turnover. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 69(4), 637-686.
- Solutions. (2009). 2008 Facts and figures. Retrieved from <http://www.ext.vt.edu/news/solutions/solutions2009/Articles/facts.html>
- Spector, P.E. (1985). Measurement of human service staff satisfaction: Development of the Job Satisfaction Survey. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 13(6), 693-713.
- Spencer, D.G., Steers, R.M., & Mowday, R.T. (1983). An empirical test of the inclusion of job search linkages into Mobley's model of the turnover decision process. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 56(2), 137-144.
- Spherion Staffing Services. (2010). Emerging Workforce 2009. Retrieved from http://www.spherion.com/EW_Study/Spherion_EmergingWorkforce09_executivesummary.pdf
- Strong, R. & Harder, A. (2009). Implications of maintenance and motivation factors on Extension agent turnover. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 47(1) Article 1FEA2. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2009february/a2.php>
- Tannenbaum, S.I., Mathieu, J.E., Salas, E., & Cannon-Bowers, J.A. (1991). Meeting trainees' expectations: The influence of training fulfillment on the development of commitment, self-efficacy, and motivation. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76(6), 759-769.

- Tett, R.P. & Meyer, J.P. (1993). Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intention, and turnover: Path analyses based on meta-analytical finding. *Personnel Psychology*, 46(2), 259-293.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Institute of Food and Agriculture. (2010). *About us*. Retrieved from <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/qlinks/extension.html>
- U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010). *Career Guide to Industries, 2010-11 Edition, Food Services and Drinking Places*. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs023.htm>
- U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010). *Career Guide to Industries, 2010-11 Edition, Educational Services*. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs034.htm>
- Vandenberghe, C. & Tremblay, M. (2008). The role of pay satisfaction and organizational commitment in turnover intentions: A two-sample study. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 22(3), 275-286.
- Van Maanen, J., & Schein, E.H. (1979). Toward a theory of organizational socialization. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 1, 209-264.
- VCE. (2009). *Virginia cooperative extension promotion from associate extension agent to extension agent protocol*. Retrieved from <http://intra.ext.vt.edu/policies/documents/ExtensionAgentPromotionProtocol2009.pdf>
- Wanous, J.P. (1992). *Organizational entry: Recruitment, selection, orientation and socialization of newcomers* (2nd ed.). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Watson Wyatt. (1999). *Work USA 2000: employee commitment and the bottom line*. Bethesda, MD: Watson Wyatt. Retrieved from

<http://www.watsonwyatt.com/research/printable.asp?id=W-304>

Whitener, E.M. (2001). Do “high commitment” human resource practices affect employee commitment?: A cross-level analysis using hierarchical linear modeling. *Journal of Management*, 27(5), 515-535.

Appendix A

Southern Region Extension Survey

A fifty-one question web-based Likert-type scale questionnaire was developed by the researcher for the study. The instrument was developed by combining questions from existing instruments. To measure organizational commitment, the researcher used the 9-item short form of Mowday, Steers, and Porters' (1979) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). To measure job satisfaction, the researcher used Spector's (1985) Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS). Of the original 36 items, 18 were included in the survey in an effort to limit the length of the survey instrument and decrease respondent fatigue. To measure intent to quit, the researcher used three items developed by Landau and Hammer (1986).

Southern Region Extension Survey

1. Employment Information

Thank you for your participation in this research study. The survey will take about 10-15 minutes to complete.

1. What is your primary area(s) of responsibility? (check all that apply)

- Agriculture and Natural Resources
- Family and Consumer Science
- 4-H Youth Development
- Community Viability/Community Development
- Other (please specify)

2. Please indicate the population of the area for which you are responsible for serving.

- Under 20,000
- 20,001-40,000
- 40,001-60,000
- 60,001-80,000
- 80,001 and over

3. How many counties/parishes are you responsible for serving?

Southern Region Extension Survey

2. Human Resource Practices

Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability. These questions regard common human resource practices impacting recently hired employees.

1. Please indicate the level of agreement with each statement

	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
My job interview provided a good preview of what I actually experience on the job	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
The actual requirements of my job accurately reflect my understanding of the job when I was first hired	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Prior to my employment with Extension, I had several opportunities to observe the work of Extension	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Upon employment with Extension, I was provided with the training necessary for success in my first year on the job	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I receive professional development necessary for me to perform my job capably	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Extension provided me with an effective mentoring and coaching experience as part of my training	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

Southern Region Extension Survey

3. Human Resource Practices

Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability. These questions regard common human resource practices impacting recently hired employees.

1. Please indicate the level of agreement with each statement

	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
I am compensated fairly for the work that I perform	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Fringe benefits provided by Extension are competitive with those offered by other organizations	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Extension provides work/life balance programs which are sufficient to help me manage my personal responsibilities	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
My successes are recognized and acknowledged by my supervisor	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
The evaluation and performance management process provides meaningful feedback for me to be successful	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I have a clear understanding of the promotion requirements for this job	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

Southern Region Extension Survey

4. Organizational Perspectives

Listed below are several statements that represent possible feelings that individuals might have about the organization for which they work for.

1. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I find that my values and the organizations values are very similar	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I am extremely glad that I chose this organization to work for over others I was considering at the time i joined	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I really care about the fate of this organization	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
For me this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I am actively looking for a job outside of Extension	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

Southern Region Extension Survey

5. Job Perspectives

Listed below are several statements that represent possible feelings that individuals might have about the job that they have in an organization.

1. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN
My supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN
The benefits package we have is equitable	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN
When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN
Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN
I like the people I work with	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN
I sometimes feel my job is meaningless	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN
I am seriously thinking about quitting my job	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN
Communications seem good within this organization	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN
Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN
I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN
I find I have to work harder at my job because of the incompetence of people I work with	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN	JN

Southern Region Extension Survey

6. Job Perspectives

Listed below are several statements that represent possible feelings that individuals might have about the job that they have in an organization.

1. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
I like doing the things I do at work	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I have too much to do at work	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I often feel that I do not know what is going on with the organization	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I feel satisfied with my chances for salary increases	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
There are benefits we do not have which we should have	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I like my supervisor	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
I am satisfied with my chances for promotion	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
As soon as I can find a better job, I'll leave Extension	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

Southern Region Extension Survey

7. Personal Characteristics

Please answer the following demographic questions.

1. How many years have you been employed by your current employer?

2. What was your involvement with Cooperative Extension prior to employment? (Check all that apply)

No Previous Involvement

4-H Member

Volunteer

Client/Program Participant

Other (please specify)

3. Please choose the answer that represents your current annual gross salary.

Less than \$30,000

\$30,000-\$35,000

\$35,001-\$40,000

\$40,001-\$45,000

\$45,001-\$50,000

Greater than \$50,000

4. What is your gender?

Male

Female

5. What is your age?

6. Please share any other comments that you would like in regard to your employment experiences with Extension.

Appendix B

Justification for Human Resource Questions

Recruitment and Hiring

My job interview provided a good preview of what I actually experience on the job	(Wanous, 1992)
The actual expectations of my job accurately reflect my understanding of the job when I was first hired	(Manton & van Es, 1985)
Previous involvement in Extension programs influenced my decision to pursue a career with Extension	(Arnold & Place, 2010)

Training and Development

Upon employment with Extension, I was provided with the training necessary for initial success in my position	(Brown, Gibson, & Stuart, 2008)
I receive professional development necessary for me to perform my job capably	(McCann, 2007)
Extension provided me with a satisfying mentoring and coaching experience as part of my training	(Kutilek & Earnest, 2001)

Compensation and Benefits

I am compensated fairly for the work that I perform	(Strong & Harder, 2009)
Fringe benefits provided by Extension are competitive with those offered by other organizations with which I considered employment	(Strong & Harder, 2009)
Extension provides work/life balance programs which are sufficient to help me to manage my personal time schedule and responsibilities	(Kutilek, Conklin, & Gunderson, 2002)

Evaluation and Supervision

My successes are acknowledged by my supervisor	(Rousan & Henderson, 1996)
The evaluation and performance management process provides meaningful feedback for me to be successful	(Arnold & Place, 2010)
I have a clear understanding of the promotion requirements for this job	(Gaetner & Nollen, 1989)

Appendix C
Letter to Extension Directors

Dear Extension Director,

I am writing to request your support of a doctoral study being conducted in the Southern Region regarding the influence of human resource practices on the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of new Extension agents as they relate to intent to quit.

Mike Martin is a PhD student at Virginia Tech, working on a research study with Dr. Eric Kaufman in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education. His position as a District Director for the past seven years has ignited his interest in retention of new employees. Due to unprecedented budgetary constraints over the past seven years and as a cost saving measure, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) has experienced a drastic reduction in the number of Extension Agents/Educators. From a human resource management perspective, VCE has also experienced high levels of turnover among the new employees who have been hired. This is concerning to me and to our organization and I am fully supportive of his efforts. I am unaware of any other studies that have been conducted in this context.

This quantitative study will be conducted by utilizing an online questionnaire format. Mike will be contacting your Director of County Operations in the next couple of weeks to request a listing of the names and e-mail addresses of Extension Agents from your state who were hired after January 1st, 2004 for purposes of determining a sample. Data collection is planned for the months of October and November 2010.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Mike directly at mjmartin@vt.edu or by phone at 540-315-0816. Upon completion of the study, a summary report will be sent to you.

Sincerely,

Alan L. Grant, Ph.D.
Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech)
104 Hutcheson Hall (0402)
Blacksburg, VA 24061

Appendix D
Pre-Notice to Extension Agents

To selected Extension Educators,

In the next couple of days, you will be receiving an invitation to participate in a survey of newly hired Extension educators. This online survey is being conducted by Mr. Michael Martin, a doctoral student at Virginia Tech and also a fellow Extension professional. As a District Director, Michael is interested in studying the relationships between human resource practices and employee retention.

You have been selected for participation in a survey of Extension educators in the Southern Region who have been employed for less than six years. I encourage your participation in this study as the findings may be useful to our state in identifying human resource practices that can be implemented to minimize the premature turnover of our newer Extension educators.

Please contact Michael directly if you have any questions regarding his research at mjmartin@vt.edu or (540) 315-0816.

Sincerely,

Director of Extension

Appendix E
Initial Letter to Participants

Please send to Selected Field Educators:

[Dear First_Name:]

You have been selected for participation in a survey of Extension educators in the Southern Region who have been employed for less than six years. As a doctoral student and a fellow Extension professional, I am requesting your assistance with my current research on the relationships between human resource practices and employee retention. The survey is available at [\[survey link\]](#)

Cooperative Extension is experiencing one of it's' most difficult times as an organization. In the midst of a struggling economy, many Extension systems are seeing reduced levels of funding from federal, state, and local partners. In response Extension is looking at ways to do more with less. My research focuses on what can be done from an organizational perspective, through human resource practices, to reduce the incidence of voluntary turnover among newly hired Extension educators.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and does not impact your position in any form. All responses will be kept strictly confidential. By completing the survey your consent to participate is implied. As fellow Extension professionals, I know many of you can appreciate the importance of participating. The study will take less than 15 minutes from start to finish. Everyone who completes the survey will have the opportunity to enter a drawing for a \$50 Walmart gift card. (The odds of winning are 1 in 40. The drawing will be conducted by me and observed by my major professor, Dr. Eric Kaufman.)

Thank you in advance for your time and efforts with this important study. Please let me know if you have any additional questions regarding my research at mjmartin@vt.edu or (540) 315-0816. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Eric Kaufman, at ekaufman@vt.edu or (540) 231-6258. I look forward to receiving your responses to the survey, available at [\[survey link\]](#)

Sincerely,

Michael Martin
District Director & Phd Candidate
Virginia Cooperative Extension
Virginia Tech

Eric Kaufman
Asst. Professor & Extension Specialist
Virginia Cooperative Extension
Virginia Tech

Appendix F

Follow-Up Letter to Participants

Please send to Selected Field Educators:

[Dear First_Name:]

Last week, I sent you an email requesting your participation in a survey on the relationships between human resource practices and employee retention. Thank you so much to those of you who have already completed the survey. If you have not yet completed the survey, please take 10 minutes now to provide your responses to the questions at [\[survey link\]](#)

The feedback we are receiving is insightful, and we look forward to gaining a complete picture of experiences of Extension educators like you. To ensure an accurate representation, we need as many responses as possible. The study will help guide Extension organization practices and the effects on Extension educators across the Southern Region.

As a reminder, your participation in this study is completely voluntary and does not impact your position in any form. All responses will be kept strictly confidential. By completing the survey your consent to participate is implied. As fellow Extension professionals, I know many of you can appreciate the importance of participating. Everyone who completes the survey will have the opportunity to enter a drawing for a \$50 Walmart gift card. (The odds of winning are 1 in 40. The drawing will be conducted by me and observed by my major professor, Dr. Eric Kaufman.)

Thank you in advance for your time and efforts with this important study. Please let me know if you have any additional questions regarding my research at mjmartin@vt.edu or (540) 315-0816. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Eric Kaufman, at ekaufman@vt.edu or (540) 231-6258. Once again, I look forward to receiving your responses to the survey, available at [\[survey link\]](#)

Sincerely,

Michael Martin
District Director & Phd Candidate
Virginia Cooperative Extension
Virginia Tech

Eric Kaufman
Asst. Professor & Extension Specialist
Virginia Cooperative Extension
Virginia Tech

Appendix G

Follow-Up Letter to Participants

Please send to Selected Field Educators:

[Dear First_Name:]

Two weeks ago, I sent a reminder email requesting your participation in a survey on the relationships between human resource practices and employee retention. Thank you so much to those of you who have already completed the survey. If you have not yet completed the survey, please take 10 minutes now to provide your responses to the questions at [\[survey link\]](#). The survey will close on December 1st, 2010.

The feedback we are receiving continues to provide insightful information. We look forward to gaining a more complete picture of experiences of Extension educators like you. To ensure an accurate representation, we need as many responses as possible. The study will help guide Extension organization practices and the effects on Extension educators across the Southern Region.

As a reminder, your participation in this study is completely voluntary and does not impact your position in any form. All responses will be kept strictly confidential. By completing the survey your consent to participate is implied. As fellow Extension professionals, I know many of you can appreciate the importance of participating. Everyone who completes the survey will have the opportunity to enter a drawing for a \$50 Walmart gift card. (The odds of winning are 1 in 40. The drawing will be conducted by me and observed by my major professor, Dr. Eric Kaufman.)

Thank you in advance for your time and efforts with this important study. Please let me know if you have any additional questions regarding my research at mjmartin@vt.edu or (540) 315-0816. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Eric Kaufman, at ekaufman@vt.edu or (540) 231-6258. Once again, I look forward to receiving your responses to the survey, available at [\[survey link\]](#)

Sincerely,

Michael Martin
District Director & Phd Candidate
Virginia Cooperative Extension
Virginia Tech

Eric Kaufman
Asst. Professor & Extension Specialist
Virginia Cooperative Extension
Virginia Tech