The Relationship between Perceptions of Organizational Functioning and Voluntary Counselor Turnover: A Longitudinal Investigation

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Overview

- Voluntary turnover is a major concern in the SUD tx field
  - Detrimental to patient care
  - Negative effects on existing employees
  - Financial cost to tx centers

- Understanding the predictors of turnover is important to enhance organizational effectiveness and better understand the turnover process
Background and Study Purpose

- Estimates of actual turnover vary widely
  - Range from 16% (McNulty et al., 2007) to 50% (McLellan et al., 2003)
  - Recent study found annual rate of 33% among counselors (Eby et al., 2010)

- Research Question: How much voluntary counselor turnover occurs annually over a 3 year period?
  - Track a cohort of counselors to determine if annual turnover rates are stable, increase, or decrease over time
Most research focuses on turnover intentions

- Corrected correlation between TO intentions and actual TO is only .45 (Tett & Meyer 1993)
- We don’t know much about the predictors of actual turnover in this occupation

Perceptions of the organizational environment as predictors of turnover

- Fair treatment by tx center (procedural & distributive justice)
- Perceived organizational support
- Intrinsically satisfying work
Background and Study Purpose

- Perceptions of leadership effectiveness as predictors of turnover
  - Relationship quality with clinical supervisor
  - Clinical supervisor job performance
  - Clinical supervisor extra-role behavior

- Our study extends existing research by:
  - Moving beyond organization-level predictors of actual turnover (Knight et al., 2009; McNulty et al., 2007)
  - Using a prospective, 4-wave longitudinal design
Method

- Longitudinal data from Project MERITS
- 26 CTN-affiliated SUD tx organizations
  - Non-profit (88%)
  - Free-standing not on hospital campus (85%)
  - Accredited (69%)
  - Geographically dispersed
  - No prison-based, VHA, or driving under influence
- Paper and pencil surveys from 598 counselors in year 1 (> 80% response rate)
- Turnover data in year 2, 3, and 4
Method

- Reliable and valid multi-item scales on counselor survey (alphas = .80-.98)
- Turnover data from organizational records on counselors participating in year 1 survey
- Control variables of counselor gender, race, certification status included in all analyses
Results

- Survival analysis with Cox regression
- Voluntary turnover rates over time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Wave</th>
<th>Additional Turnover</th>
<th>Cumulative Turnover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>08%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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</tbody>
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Results

- Perceptions of the organizational environment
  - Higher procedural justice – 15% less likely to turnover
  - Higher distributive justice – 18% less likely to turnover
  - Stronger perceptions of organizational support – 14% less likely to turnover
  - Higher job satisfaction – 23% less likely to turnover
- No significant results for perceived leadership effectiveness
Discussion

- First study to systematically investigate actual turnover among counselors over extended period of time
  - Over 4 years of study, 47% voluntarily left – this is serious cause for concern
  - Initial spike in turnover, then relatively stable
  - Could reflect changing economic conditions over the duration of study
Favorable perceptions of the organizational environment are important predictors of turnover

- Work attitudes matter!
- Intrinsic job satisfaction was a particularly strong predictor of subsequent turnover

Counselor perceptions of leadership effectiveness did not predict turnover

- Surprising finding
- Other factors more important in predicting TO than effective supervision
Implications

- Lots of evidence-based strategies for improving counselor perceptions of the organizational environment
  - *Provide decision-making freedom in job*
  - *Allow voice in organizational decisions*
  - *Provide frequent and positive feedback*
  - *Clarify work role expectations*
  - *Encourage professional development*
  - *Help counselors develop career goals*
Acknowledgements

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