Thomas R. Wotruba & Pradeep K. Tyagi

Met Expectations and Turnover in Direct Selling

Met expectations, the difference between what one expects on the job and what one experiences, has not been discussed as a precursor to turnover among salespeople. The authors' study of direct salespeople shows that stayers and leavers differ significantly on met expectations in both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. The managerial usefulness of such findings is discussed.

A significant effort has been made through recent studies to understand turnover in salesforces (Fern, Avila, and Grewal 1989; Futrell and Parasuraman 1984; Johnston et al. 1987, 1988; Jolson, Dubinsky, and Anderson 1987; Kerber and Campbell 1987; Lucas et al. 1987; Parasuraman and Futrell 1983; Sager, Varadarajan, and Futrell 1988). Much of this effort has been built on an extensive literature on turnover in other occupations, which has been distilled in numerous summaries and models (Bluedorn 1982; Cotton and Tuttle 1986; Mobley 1977; Mobley et al. 1979; Muchinsky and Morrow 1980; Muchinsky and Tuttle 1979; Price 1977; Steers and Mowday 1981). Though most of the variables proposed in these models to influence turnover have been analyzed in salesforce settings, one that has not is met expectations (ME). Our study is a first attempt to fill that gap.

Porter and Steers (1973), in their review of turnover studies, proclaimed "the centrality of the concept of met expectations in the withdrawal decision" (p. 170). They defined met expectations as the discrepancy between what a person encounters on the job in terms of positive and negative experiences and what he or she expected to encounter. Employees can have very different expectations about individual conditions or circumstances of a job, so that a given job condition might not have a uniform impact on each person's decision to stay or leave. However, the extent to which each individual's particular expectations are perceived to be met might vary much more systematically, and Porter and Steers predicted that when an individual's expectations are not substantially met, his or her propensity to withdraw increases. Thus it is the comparison between expectations and experience, not either one alone, that influences one's propensity to quit the job or stay. Reviews of turnover research by Muchinsky and Tuttle (1979), Muchinsky and Morrow (1980), Steers and Mowday (1981), Bluedorn (1982), and Cotton and Tuttle (1986) all support the impact of met expectations on turnover. Analogous support is found in research on disconfirmed expectations (the relationship between purchase expectations and perceived prod'ct performance) in the consumer satisfaction literature (Cadotte, Woodruff, and Jenkins 1987; Oliver 1980).

Porter and Steers stated that "job satisfaction is viewed as the sum total of an individual's met expectations on the job" (p. 169). In other words, the

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comparison of expectations with experiences over time identifies the process whereby job satisfaction is determined. For managers, the concept of met expectations may be more useful than job satisfaction for two related reasons. First, it offers a more complete understanding of how one's job satisfaction evolves to be what it is. This understanding, in turn, should help managers diagnose the causes of job dissatisfaction (i.e., the extent to which they lie in expectations or in experiences). The second reason involves policy making and remedial action—how ME of employees can be influenced. On the basis of a series of research studies, Wanous (1980) has shown that organizational recruits who are provided realistic expectations are likely to have greater job satisfaction and longer tenure than recruits with inflated expectations. Thus, if enthusiastic recruiters "oversell" a job opportunity to a desirable applicant, creating unrealistically high expectations, that applicant may take the job but may also leave it soon as disappointment sets in. Expectation levels of new recruits can be influenced during the period in which they are socialized into the organization, however, by giving each recruit a full and accurate picture of life in the organization, and by emphasizing the comparison between the recruit's needs and the organization's resources (Feldman 1976). Wanous (1973) showed, for example, that realistic job previews during recruiting did not lower the job acceptance rate, but did reduce initial expectations as well as subsequent turnover.

One category of sales organizations that have high turnover includes direct selling firms such as Mary Kay Cosmetics, Tupperware, and Amway. A recent review of the direct selling industry indicated that 5.8 million Americans (5% of the labor force) work for these firms, producing more than $8 billion in sales (Biggart 1989). A typical direct selling firm averages at least 100% turnover per year, however, in comparison with a 23% average in salesforces of U.S. manufacturers (Coleman 1989), and salesforce turnover is an acknowledged problem in the industry (McGuire 1984; Popper 1984). Recruiting practices in direct selling involve building expectations in hopes of motivating the independent agents to devote great effort to their job. Direct mail recruitment materials feature testimonials from highly successful salespeople, along with headlines such as "Earn Up To $1000 per Month (and More)!" (Bernstein 1984). Though direct selling "gives full rein to ambition, and people are often driven by dreams of riches" (Biggart 1989, p. 159), the result might also be an unrealistic buildup of expectations among many new recruits, with subsequent disappointment and withdrawal.

Direct selling firms are not alone in providing optimistic recruiting messages. Wanous (1980, p. 34–35) describes traditional recruitment by organizations in general as the practice of selling the organization to outsiders by stressing only positive characteristics rather than those things insiders find dissatisfying, and distorting the positive features to make them seem even more positive. Dunnette, Arvey, and Banas (1973, p. 37) used the term "seduction" to describe the practices of campus recruiters for a major U.S. manufacturing firm. Such tactics might be especially effective in attracting new sales recruits from college campuses, because many students have inaccurate perceptions of what sales jobs involve (Dubinsky 1981).

Purpose

The purpose of our study is to examine the impact of met expectations (ME) on voluntary turnover among salespeople in direct selling firms. Our study is somewhat different from prior turnover studies in salesforces for two reasons. First, a literature search revealed no published studies reporting relationships between ME and turnover in sales organizations. Second, ME is a different type of construct from those explored previously in that ME involves a process rather than a specific set of variables defined in a particular domain. Variables drawn from such domains as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, leadership consideration, self-esteem, and even job performance could be candidates for use in assessing met expectations. We therefore explore the issue of whether met expectations about certain aspects of the job experience are more cogent than others in relating to turnover.

A further purpose of our study is to investigate ME over time and thus determine the sensitivity of turnover to changes in ME. The test of whether one's expectations for a job are met does not happen immediately upon employment, but rather requires a period of job experience. As this experience occurs, the jobholder draws conclusions about the extent to which his or her initial expectations are being met. Persons who perceive an enlarging gap between experiences and expectations might be likely candidates for job withdrawal, whereas those whose ME gap is not increasing (or perhaps even lessening) might be less likely to quit. Literature supporting this point is noted in the next section.

Background

We summarize the literature relevant to our study in four parts: studies of met expectations and related concepts, studies of the socialization process in sales organizations, longitudinal studies showing the effects on turnover of changes over time in predictor variables, and studies involving turnover in direct selling.

Met Expectations and Related Concepts

Table 1 summarizes the research literature on met expectations and related concepts. Of the 11 studies on ME, seven used a retrospective measure asking the subjects to report the difference between what they expected and what they experienced. The other four studies used separate measures of expectations and experience at two different points in time. Three of the 11 studies employed a single-item measure of ME, whereas in the other studies the number of items measuring ME ranged up to 46. Among the eight studies using multiple-item scales, only one (Dean and Wanous 1984) employed a previously tested instrument, the Job Descriptive Index. In the other studies, the researchers created the scales and noted no specific underlying conceptual schemes. For example, Katzell (1968, p. 155) used 136 items related to "satisfactions and stresses expected and experienced" by nursing students, and Hom, Griffeth, and Sellaro (1984, p. 144) referred to their scale simply as consisting of "46 job outcomes."

In only five of the eight multi-item studies were reliability scores reported for the ME scales, and they ranged from .92 to .49. Correlations between ME and turnover (or tenure) were provided in seven studies. In three they were not statistically significant (though in one of those three ME showed a significant correlation with intentions to quit). The four significant relationships were all negative. Correlations between ME and job satisfaction were reported in six studies, all of which produced positive and statistically significant results.

The five additional studies summarized in Table 1 involve concepts related to ME and findings that suggest support for the ME-turnover relationship. In brief, lowered initial expectations through realistic job previews were associated with lower turnover, both in the Weitz (1956) study and in the literature summary on realistic job previews by Wanous (1980). Perceived incidence of positive and negative job experiences was related to job satisfaction (Dugoni and Ilgen 1981), whereas expectations that job outcomes would be obtained were related negatively to turnover (Youngblood, Mobley, and Meglino 1983). Realistic expectations, which involve recalling the extent to which one had accurate knowledge about the job when hired rather than concluding whether one's initial expectations (realistic or not) have been met, were related negatively to turnover (Stumpf and Hartman 1984).

Socialization in Sales Organizations

Met expectations are involved in an early stage of organizational socialization, often termed the "anticipatory socialization" stage (Feldman 1976). A study of new salespeople aimed at testing a model of salesforce socialization found that greater realism on the part of the salesperson when entering the job led to greater job satisfaction (Dubinsky et al. 1986). This finding was reinforced by Sager and Johnston (1989), as summarized in Table 1. Though neither of these studies related aspects of the socialization process such as expectations (whether met or realistic) to turnover, Wanous (1980) showed that expectations developed in early stages of socialization (especially during recruitment) can affect turnover.

Longitudinal Studies and Changes Over Time

A literature search uncovered no studies of met expectations in a longitudinal design, but findings on related attitudinal variables provide analogies that might apply to our study. For instance, changes in job satisfaction over time have been found to be related to changes in intention to remain on the job (Kraut 1975) and to changes in propensity to leave (Johnston et al. 1987). Even though job satisfaction may decline over time, the decline is less for persons who stay than for those who leave (Youngblood, Mobley, and Meglino 1983). Similar patterns have been found for organizational commitment, with substantial decreases in commitment occurring approximately two months prior to turnover (Porter, Crampon, and Smith 1976). In summary, longitudinal studies suggest that quitting follows a decline in satisfaction or commitment that is significantly greater for the leavers than for the stayers. Turnover might be similarly influenced by declining met expectations.

Met Expectations and Turnover in Direct Selling

A turnover model for direct selling incorporating met expectations and 13 other variables was proposed by Wotruba, Sciglimpaglia, and Tyagi (1987), but the linkages in that model were not tested. Jolson, Dubinsky, and Anderson (1987) included a single-item measure of met expectations (termed "attainment of initial job expectations") in their turnover study on four types of sales organizations including direct selling, but reported no relationship between ME and turnover for any of the sales organization types. No other study of direct salespeople has involved ME, but one did incorporate propensity to quit, a turnover measure (Wotruba 1989). In that study, negative relationships were found between specific goal setting and both propensity to quit and earnings per hour. Those findings can be recast within a met expectations context if goal setting is interpreted as establishing expectations. In such cases, salespeople might be encouraged to set optimistically high goals, as already noted, which may lead to a greater commitment of time on the job but disappointing earnings for the time

TABLE 1
Summary of Findings: Met Expectations and Related Studies

Study	Subjects	How Measured	Reliability[a]	Results
Studies Involving Met Expectations				
Katzell (1968)	Nursing students	Initial expectations on 136 items measuring job satisfaction and stresses; experiences on same items 8 months later	n.a.	r between turnover and: confirmed expectations = $-.129$ ($p < .01$); unconfirmed expectations = $+.112$ ($p < .01$)
Dunnette, Arvey, and Banas (1973)	College graduates who were present or former employees of Ford Motor Company	15 job features, 4-point scales (retrospective met expectations)	n.a.	Graphic comparison showing the met expectations of those staying with the company were better than the met expectations of those leaving the company
Federico, Federico, and Lundquist (1976)	Female credit union employees who had quit voluntarily	Salary expected as measured at time of employment compared with highest salary achieved	n.a.	Achieved salary related positively to tenure; expected salary related negatively to tenure; (achieved − expected) salary correlated with tenure: $r = .68$ ($p < .01$)
Feldman (1976)	Hospital employees	2-item scale termed "realism" (retrospective met expectations)	.74	r with general satisfaction = .336 ($p < .001$)
Reilly et al. (1981)	Telephone service representatives	5-item scale (retrospective met expectations)	.74	r with organizational commitment = .42 ($p < .01$); r with turnover = $-.12$ ($p < .05$)
Arnold and Feldman (1982)	Accountants	Single-item 7-point scale (retrospective met expectations)	n.a.	r with job satisfaction = .39 ($p < .001$); r with organizational commitment = .37 ($p < .001$); r with turnover = $-.26$ ($p < .001$)
Michaels and Spector (1982)	Mental health facility employees	Single item (retrospective met expectations)	n.a.	r with job satisfaction = .34 ($p < .05$); r with organizational commitment = .18 ($p < .05$); r with turnover = .05 (not significant)
Greenhaus, Seidel, and Marinis (1983)	Graduates of a technological college	14-item 7-point scales measuring expectations at time of job acceptance; same items 3 months later measuring experiences	.49	r with satisfaction = .40 to .48 ($p < .01$) for various facets of met expectations
Dean and Wanous (1984)	Bank tellers	JDI used in "expectations" format on first day of job; JDI used in "descriptive" format 8 weeks later	.66 to .84 for subscales	Analysis done only for realistic job previews, not met expectations
Hom, Griffeth, and Sellaro (1984)	Hospital employees	46 items measuring job outcomes (retrospective met expectations)	.92	r with job satisfaction = .70 ($p < .05$); r with turnover = $-.08$ (n.s.)
Lee and Mowday (1987)	Financial institution employees	9-item, 5-point scale (retrospective met expectations)	.85	r with job satisfaction = .47 ($p < .05$); r with organizational commitment = .33 ($p < .05$); r with intentions to quit = $-.27$ ($p < .05$); r with a dichotomous measure of turnover = .04 (n.s.)

TABLE 1 (continued)

Study	Subjects	How Measured	Reliability[a]	Results
Studies Involving Related Concepts				
Weitz (1956)	Life insurance agents	Studied initial expectations only; one group of applicants received "realistic" job previews and the other group received none	n.a.	Significantly lower % terminated among those receiving realistic job previews
Dugoni and Ilgen (1981)	Part-time retail food chain employees	Initial expectations measured on 35 items in five job content areas; perceived experience in same areas two months later; differences between expectations and experience not reported	.37 to .79 for subscales	r between perceptions and job satisfaction = .50 ($p < .01$); neither initial expectations nor experiences correlated with turnover
Youngblood, Mobley, and Meglino (1983)	Marine Corps recruits	50 role outcomes: desirability times expectancy that those outcomes would be obtained (each on a 5-point scale)	n.a.	Leavers had significantly lower role-outcome scores than did the stayers
Stumpf and Hartman (1984)	Users of on-campus placement services of a graduate school of business	3-item, 7-point realistic expectations scale administered 2 or 3 months after organizational entry	.90	r with work satisfaction = .38 ($p < .01$); r with organizational commitment = .32 ($p < .01$); r with turnover = −.24 ($p < .05$)
Sager and Johnston (1989)	Salespeople for a national manufacturer	3-item anticipatory socialization scale, in which two items asked whether, given present knowledge, the subject would have taken the job and worked for the company	.74	r with work satisfaction = .445 ($p < .05$); r with organizational commitment = .503 ($p < .05$); turnover not measured

[a]n.a. indicates reliability is not available.

spent. Such goals might produce unrealistic and unmet expectations, followed by discouragement and withdrawal.

Study Design and Hypotheses

The research design for our study is presented first as a foundation for the hypothesis statements. Figure 1 is a diagram of the design. ME measures were obtained from two groups of salespeople, (1) actives, or those who were actively involved in selling for their companies, and (2) inactives, or those who had terminated their direct selling activities. Each of these groups was measured at two points in time (t_1 and t_2), approximately one year apart. One year was considered a sufficient time span to allow possible changes in met expectations within the group that was active at t_1, thereby permitting a test of the impact of those changes on turnover.

The inactives at t_1 were not studied further at t_2. The actives at t_1 were measured again at t_2, and categorized as either active or inactive depending on their status at t_2. Measures of met expectations obtained at t_1 and t_2 are noted as ME_1 and ME_2, respectively, and the changes in those measures between t_1 and t_2 are noted as ME_d.

Four hypotheses were formulated, which are supported by or consistent with the literature reviewed. Based on the design in Figure 1, the hypotheses tested are:

H_1: ME_1 of actives at t_1 are greater than ME_1 of inactives at t_1.

H_2: ME_2 of actives at t_2 are greater than ME_2 of inactives at t_2.

H_3: ME_1 of actives at t_2 are the same as ME_1 of inactives at t_2.

H_4: ME_d of actives at t_2 are less than ME_d of inactives at t_2.

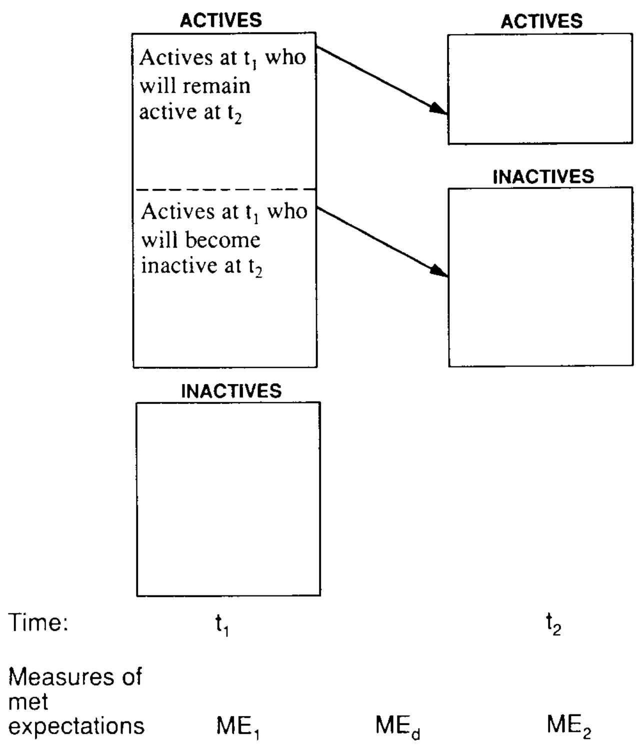
The first two hypotheses are cross-sectional, implying that the actives and inactives at any point in time differ in their met expectations at that time. The third hypothesis suggests that turnover at t_2 would not have been possible to predict from ME measures one year earlier at t_1. The fourth hypothesis involves a longitudinal measure, indicating that the change in ME between t_1 and t_2 is a significant antecedent of turnover among the active salespeople. Thus, H_3 and H_4 together suggest that turnover at t_2 is related more to the differences in ME_d than to differences in ME_1.

Method

Sample

Names and addresses of salespeople were obtained from four participating direct selling firms: Mary Kay Cosmetics, Saladmaster, Tupperware, and United Con-

FIGURE 1
Research Design



sumers Club. A total of 1600 salespeople from all parts of the U.S. who had affiliated with these firms within the previous few months were contacted by mail, and responses were received from 491 (a 31% response rate), who constituted the t_1 sample. A low response rate was anticipated because of the high turnover and mobility inherent in this population, as well as the fact that for many of the salespeople, direct selling was not their primary job and hence they would have little motivation to respond. Response rates in other mail survey studies involving met expectations or turnover are 32% among female former employees of one credit union (Federico, Federico, and Lundquist 1976), 37% among life insurance agents (Weitz and Nuckols 1955), 49% among former employees of Ford Motor Company (Dunnette, Arvey, and Banas 1973), and 52% among active salespeople in one national pharmaceutical firm (Futrell and Parasuraman 1984).

Because many of the individuals drawn in our sample were expected to have already quit their direct selling work, they were urged in a cover letter to reply whether or not they were still active. Reaching persons relatively new in the job was desirable because they perhaps could recall more accurately their initial expectations. The average respondent had been in direct selling about eight months, 85% were women, the median age was 27, 62% were married, and the median annual household income was $27,000. Of the total 491 respondents, 296 were still active and 195 had already become inactive.

The 296 actives at t_1 constituted the list of salespeople who were mailed a followup questionnaire about one year later. Responses were received from 175, who became the t_2 sample. Likely reasons for nonresponse include failure to receive the mail questionnaire because of geographic mobility and lack of interest because of quitting the direct selling job. In other longitudinal studies of related variables employing a survey approach, response rates in the followup phase were lower than the 59% we achieved (Bateman and Strasser 1983; Farrell and Rusbult 1981; Kraut 1975). Further, the loss of nonrespondents is believed to have little impact on the findings at either time period because the hypotheses involve *comparisons* between actives and inactives rather than inferences about either group alone, and both groups were represented in adequate numbers.

Of the 175 respondents at t_2, 71 were still active and 104 had become inactive since t_1. The average respondent had been in direct selling about 18 months, 90% were women, the median age was 32, 77% were married, and the median annual household income was $31,000. In comparison with the t_1 respondents, the t_2 respondents were somewhat older, more likely to be female as well as married, and had somewhat higher household income.

Measures

Respondents categorized themselves as either active or inactive on one question in the questionnaire. The measure of met expectations contained 25 items, as shown in Table 2. An initial listing of items drawn from Porter and Steers (1973) and Steers and Mowday (1981) was refined and augmented on the basis of two focus group discussions with direct salespeople. The items were answered on a 7-point scale anchored from "my experience with this aspect (of my direct selling job) is very much less than I expected" to a similar phrase ending with "very much more than I expected," the midpoint on the scale being "about equal to what I expected." Thus, scale positions above 4 reflect expectations that were exceeded and scale positions below 4 reflect expectations not achieved. As in the majority of the studies cited in the literature, the measure we used is retrospective because the alternative of using separate measures of expectations and experience at different points in time would be impractical in a geographically dispersed national sample of salespeople who had joined their firms at various times. Expectations at the time of hire reflect reasons for taking the job, and these rather than expectations at a subsequent point in time were used because work by Wanous (1973, 1980) has shown strong associations between expectations at time of hire and job survival. Table 2 indicates the mean scale posi-

TABLE 2
Met Expectations Items and Respondents' Mean Scores[a]

Item	Mean Response at t_1 Total	Mean Response at t_1 Actives	Mean Response at t_1 Inactives	Mean Respose at t_2 Total	Mean Respose at t_2 Actives	Mean Respose at t_2 Inactives
1. Getting special awards or recognition	4.91	5.28	4.36	5.05	5.30	4.90
2. Individual effort required	4.87	4.95	4.70	4.93	4.83	5.00
3. Opportunity to make friends	4.78	4.99	4.39	4.91	5.03	4.85
4. Respect from fellow salespersons	4.67	5.07	4.10	4.70	4.96	4.53
5. Success relates directly to initiative	4.66	4.79	4.46	4.85	4.86	4.84
6. Attention and appreciation from supervisors	4.63	5.04	4.02	4.73	4.99	4.58
7. Development of selling skills	4.60	4.88	4.20	4.66	4.93	4.49
8. Products are highly competitive	4.55	4.81	4.21	4.59	4.77	4.47
9. Feelings of loyal association with the company	4.51	5.01	3.81	4.58	4.96	4.36
10. Opportunity to demonstrate job responsibility	4.48	4.57	4.35	4.51	4.56	4.48
11. Support from supervisors	4.45	4.83	3.87	4.54	4.86	4.35
12. Increasing my self-esteem	4.40	4.88	3.74	4.45	4.77	4.26
13. Advancement opportunities	4.39	4.82	3.81	4.44	4.82	4.20
14. Opportunity to work on a team	4.30	4.57	3.93	4.41	4.70	4.21
15. Chance to be creative and innovative	4.28	4.84	3.48	4.59	4.79	4.47
16. Minimum of rejection by prospects	4.28	4.29	4.25	4.21	4.10	4.29
17. Feelings of self-fulfillment	4.24	4.80	3.45	4.38	4.85	4.08
18. Opportunity for professional growth	4.21	4.73	3.44	4.34	4.81	4.04
19. Feelings of worthwhile accomplishment	4.11	4.75	3.19	4.41	4.96	4.06
20. Freedom to do the job as I wish	4.11	4.63	3.40	4.34	4.75	4.06
21. Making use of my skills	4.06	4.51	3.41	4.27	4.52	4.12
22. Desirable work hours	4.05	4.50	3.37	4.08	4.50	3.79
23. Prestige of the job	3.73	4.10	3.16	3.82	4.10	3.65
24. High income opportunity	3.61	4.18	2.77	3.47	4.04	3.08
25. Predictable earnings	3.50	3.99	2.76	3.37	3.93	3.00

[a]Respondents were given the following written instructions:
Think back to when you first took this direct selling job, and the expectations you had about the job at that time. For each of the following aspects of the job, please compare your actual experience to date with what you expected. Circle the number corresponding to what you have actually experienced.

- If you have experienced very much less than you expected, circle the 1.
- If your experience is about equal to what you expected, circle the 4.
- If you have experienced very much more than you expected, circle the 7.
- Circle the 2, 3, 5, or 6 if they best represent the amount of difference between what you expected and what you have experienced.

The scale positions were labeled as follows:

1. Very much less than I expected.
2. Moderately less than I expected.
3. A little less than I expected.
4. About equal to what I expected.
5. A little more than I expected.
6. Moderately more than I expected.
7. Very much more than I expected.

tions for the respondents in total as well as for the actives and inactives at both t_1 and t_2.

The reliability (alpha) of the 25-item scale among the respondents at t_1 is .93 and it is also .93 among the respondents at t_2. Convergent validity is evidenced by correlation between ME and job satisfaction, as suggested by Porter and Steers' (1973) assertion that job satisfaction arises from how well an individual's expectations are met on the job and similar correlations from prior studies reported in Table 1. In our study, the 25-item scale was correlated with a 10-item job satisfaction scale drawn from the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) devised by Hackman and Oldham (1975), producing an $r = .77$ ($p < .001$).

Findings

Each hypothesis requires a test of the difference between the means of two independent samples, the results of which are reported in Table 3. One-tailed tests are used for H_1, H_2, and H_4, and a two-tailed test is used for H_3. In support of H_1, the mean ME_1 score is

TABLE 3
Comparisons of Met Expectations Among Groups

Hypothesis	Groups and Measures Compared	For 25-Item ME Measure		t	p[a]
		Mean Score	S.D.		
1	ME_1 of actives at t_1	117.30	20.79		
	vs.				
	ME_1 of inactives at t_1	94.55	22.96	10.76	.0001
2	ME_2 of actives at t_2	116.12	20.74		
	vs.				
	ME_2 of inactives at t_2	105.84	22.50	2.97	.0015
3	ME_1 of actives at t_2	119.09	20.18		
	vs.				
	ME_1 of inactives at t_2	116.92	20.77	.65	.515
4	ME_d of actives at t_2	−2.63	19.82		
	vs.				
	ME_d of inactives at t_2	−9.78	21.23	−2.07	.020

[a]The probabilities (p) reflect one-tailed tests for H_1, H_2, and H_4, and a two-tailed test for H_3.

substantially greater for actives than for inactives at t_1. Likewise, the mean ME_2 score is significantly greater for actives than for inactives at t_2, supporting H_2. H_3 states that actives and inactives at t_2 do not differ significantly in their ME_1 score, and is confirmed by our finding of a small and nonsignificant difference. Finally, when the differences in ME scores between t_1 and t_2 are computed and the mean differences compared between actives and inactives at t_2, a significant difference is found, which supports H_4. Thus, all four hypotheses are supported.

A factor analysis was performed to determine whether the 25-item ME scale would partition into subscales, thereby identifying any separate dimensions of met expectations. Using varimax rotation, we produced four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, as shown on Table 4. In this exploratory analysis, each variable was assigned to the factor on which it loaded at .50 or higher while loading at less than .50 on any other factor. Factor 1 captured eight items, and this 8-item subscale was characterized as measuring "outcomes and rewards." Factor 2 produced a 4-item scale, which was termed "interpersonal relations." Factor 3's 5-item scale was named "conditions of work participation" and factor 4's 4-item scale was called "job challenges and demands." The four items at the bottom of Table 4 did not meet the factor assignment criteria and were not included in any subscale. A second factor analysis run after deletion of those four items provided essentially the same loadings and the identical factor structure. The coefficient alpha measures of reliability of the subscales are reported in Table 4 and seem acceptable, at least for the first three of the four subscales. The unidimensionality of each subscale was assessed by running separate factor analyses on each, and only one factor was extracted in each case.

The four hypotheses were analyzed again with each of the four ME subscales to determine whether the hypotheses were supported only for certain dimensions of ME and not for others. The results are reported in Table 5. H_1 is supported for each subscale. H_2 is supported for only three of the four subscales; no significant difference is found between actives and inactives at t_2 on job challenges and demands. H_3 is supported across all four subscales. H_4, however, is supported only with two of the subscales (outcomes and rewards, and conditions of work participation). Possible reasons for finding only partial support for H_2 and H_4 with the subscales are discussed in the following section.

Discussion

In cross-sectional measures, ME in general appears strongly related to turnover when both variables are assessed simultaneously. ME measures at a given point in time do not predict turnover at a later point in time—at least over the one-year span used in our study—but changes in ME over time do correspond to turnover behavior. Both stayers and leavers experienced a negative change in met expectations overall, but the change was significantly ($p < .02$) more negative for leavers. This finding corresponds to those of Youngblood, Mobley, and Meglino (1983) on job satisfaction and of Porter, Crampon, and Smith (1976) on organizational commitment.

When the ME scales used in our study were subdivided into four subscales via factor analysis, subscales 1 and 3 gave the same pattern of results as the aggregate findings in Table 3. However, some exceptions to the aggregate pattern emerged for the other two subscales. Subscale 4 measuring job challenges and demands did not distinguish between stayers and

TABLE 4
Factor Analysis of Met Expectations Items

Item[a]	Loadings on Factor[b] 1	2	3	4
24. High income opportunity	.81	.19	.19	−.05
25. Predictable earnings	.80	.20	.14	−.03
19. Feelings of worthwhile accomplishment	.68	.40	.25	.12
13. Advancement opportunities	.61	.26	.28	.21
18. Opportunity for professional growth	.58	.46	.17	.24
21. Making use of my skills	.56	.32	.30	.22
22. Desirable work hours	.51	.02	.42	−.01
23. Prestige of the job	.50	.27	.27	−.08
11. Support from supervisors	.25	.82	−.00	.09
6. Attention and appreciation from supervisors	.34	.80	.05	.11
14. Opportunity to work on a team	.16	.58	.36	.11
7. Development of selling skills	.16	.57	.38	.17
3. Opportunity to make friends	−.02	.38	.66	.07
20. Freedom to do the job as I wish	.41	.08	.65	.05
15. Chance to be creative and innovative	.45	.29	.61	.13
8. Products are highly competitive	.23	.00	.58	.12
9. Feelings of loyal association with the company	.43	.37	.53	.11
2. Individual effort required	−.01	.02	.22	.76
5. Success relates directly to initiative	.12	.19	.01	.64
10. Opportunity to demonstrate responsibility	.34	.08	−.09	.59
16. Minimum of rejection by prospects	−.27	.08	.16	.52
17. Feelings of self-fulfillment	.51	.42	.50	.06
4. Respect from fellow salespersons	.19	.56	.52	.06
1. Getting special awards or recognition	.30	.49	.45	.16
12. Increasing my self-esteem	.43	.48	.46	.10
Total variance explained by 4 factors = 59%				
Reliability of subscales (alpha) =	.89	.81	.81	.55

[a]The number for each item corresponds to the numbers in Table 2.
[b]Descriptors assigned to each factor are: factor 1, outcomes and rewards; factor 2, interpersonal relations; factor 3, conditions of work participation; and factor 4, job challenges and demands. The items assigned to each factor are indicated by underlined loadings. The bottom four items were not assigned to any factor.

TABLE 5
Comparisons of Met Expectations Among Groups by Factor Subscales

	Subscales: 1. Outcomes and Rewards		2. Interpersonal Relations		3. Conditions of Work Participation		4. Job Challenges and Demands	
Hypothesis[a]	t	p[b]	t	p	t	p	t	p
1	11.68	.0001	7.05	.0001	9.51	.0001	2.27	.012
2	4.19	.0001	2.43	.0008	2.76	.003	−.44	.329
3	1.34	.182	1.81	.072	.26	.792	−.35	.726
4	−2.29	.012	−.68	.250	−2.25	.013	.24	.404

[a]For groups and measures compared in each hypothesis, see Table 3.
[b]The probabilities (p) reflect one-tailed tests for H_1, H_2, and H_4 and a two-tailed test for H_3.

leavers in a cross-sectional analysis of t_2. Eighteen months after starting on the job, actives and inactives were perceiving the items in that subscale (individual effort, initiative needed, responsibility, and rejection by prospects) relatively equally in comparison with their expectations. Differences in ME from t_1 to t_2 on this subscale also did not distinguish between stayers and leavers. Hence, this subscale appears to measure job characteristics that affect early turnover, but do not contribute further to turnover once the salesperson reaches a minimum threshold of tenure.

A somewhat different pattern is found with subscale 2, interpersonal relations. These items focus on working relationships with supervisors, peers, and customers. Though the extent of met expectations on these factors does not differ significantly at t_1 between those who remained active at t_2 and those who became inactive at t_2 if a .05 probability criterion is used with a two-tailed test ($p = .072$ from Table 5), the level of significance of this difference is actually .036 if a one-tailed probability is employed (i.e., changing H_3 to read: ME_1 of actives at t_2 *are greater than* ME_1 of inactives at t_2 for this particular subscale). Thus, with a one-tailed test, the interpersonal relations subscale becomes significant and the best of the four subscales at t_1 as a predictor of turnover at t_2, at which time it clearly distinguishes stayers from leavers in the cross-sectional analysis. This finding suggests that disappointment with interpersonal working relationships in the job may be an early warning signal for subsequent turnover among salespeople who do survive the first six to 10 months.

Implications

Managerial Implications

Our findings should be particularly interesting to sales executives because they have several important and potentially useful implications for practice.

First, one key to the reduction of turnover is to clarify and increase the realism of entering salespersons' expectations to bring them into closer alignment with the available rewards and opportunities. Because expectations can be influenced in the early stages of organizational entry, specifically through recruiting and hiring practices, firms must reassess their recruiting practices and appeals to determine whether they are overselling the job and thereby increasing the incidence of eventual turnover. A more cautious recruiting effort may be necessary, but the positive impact of lower turnover might make it worthwhile. For example, lower turnover would reduce the number of broken relationships between salesperson and customer and thus enhance repeat sales with satisfied customers.

Second, expectations are dynamic and are likely to be modified over time in response to past rewards, performance, available alternatives, and other factors. Managers should consider monitoring expectations to guide their policies in rewarding and compensating salespeople. Expectations surveys among salespeople can be conducted at regular intervals to assess the unique set of expectations operating at a given point in time. Such surveys also could attempt to examine the extent to which salespeople perceive that their expectations are being met.

Third, attempts can be made to increase the total number of potentially desirable job characteristics and thus increase the probability that expectations about those characteristics will be met. Such an approach may have limited applicability because of structural and financial constraints of the organization. Nevertheless, organizations can use alternative approaches for improving job characteristics in such areas as supervisor-salesperson relationships, teamwork opportunities, feedback on performance, and fairness in compensation policies.

Fourth, sales managers should think beyond job satisfaction/dissatisfaction as being the leading antecedent of turnover. Though consideration of the role of overall job satisfaction in the decision to quit is important, it tells little about the root of such satisfaction. Knowing that a salesperson is dissatisfied and about to leave does not help a manager understand *why* he or she is dissatisfied nor does it help determine what must be changed in an effort to retain that individual. The manager must examine the various expectations that a salesperson brings to the job situation and, over time, how well he or she perceives that those expectations are being met.

Fifth, organizations should attempt to determine salient job expectations based on salespersons' perceptions. All individual salespeople have expectations upon entering a new organization. These expectations may involve beliefs about the nature of the job, the rewards for satisfactory performance, the availability of interpersonal contacts and interactions, and so forth. Each salesperson is likely to have a unique set of expectations depending on his or her own values and needs at the time. Assessing expectations at the time of organizational entry is the managers' responsibility. Thus, instead of attempting to *change* what salespersons want, managers should try to *find out* what they expect. Then, in training and supervision programs, managers can direct specific attention to how each salesperson can best fulfill his or her most important expectations.

Limitations and Research Directions

Our results must be viewed in light of certain limitations. Because no commonly accepted scale is available to measure met expectations, the results based on our 25-item scale might be different if different items were used. Variations in the number and makeup of subscales also might occur. Moreover, the retrospective nature of the measure is subject to question, because it requires respondents to recall their expectations at some point in the past. Even if the same scale were used, the results might not generalize to other salesforces that differ in role or makeup from those in direct selling. Further, if different time frames were used to obtain the measures (other than the approximately 8 months and 20 months after hire as in our study), the results could be affected. In particular, a time span substantially shorter or longer than one year between t_1 and t_2 might produce different results for H_3 and H_4. The usual cautions pertaining to use of a mail questionnaire must be observed because of the possibility of common method variance and nonresponse bias.

Much additional study is needed. Despite a vast body of research on turnover, the role of met expectations within the context of broader turnover models is yet to be explored. In that process, research is needed to determine how ME relates to other variables such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, role clarity, self-esteem, and the many other components in turnover models.

A focus on met expectations itself also is needed—how are job expectations formed, what cognitive process occurs in the determination of how one's expectations are being met, and do different dimensions of expectations affect turnover decisions in different types of selling jobs and at different points in salespeople's careers? As stated previously, expectations are dynamic and they are likely to change over time. Hence, one area of future investigation is to examine how they change and how such changes influence turnover. Similarly, a related issue is how much time a salesperson may allow to elapse before believing that expectations should be met. Greater knowledge on these issues will help managers who want to understand and control turnover.

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