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A turnover model for the Mexican maquiladoras

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Abstract

Existing turnover models have been developed and tested almost exclusively in Anglo cultures. Thus, there is reason to question whether these models apply to workers elsewhere. We addressed this question using as participants 47 Mexican maquiladora workers. Through interview responses analyzed using a variation of grounded theory-building, we inductively created a model of voluntary turnover with research propositions. We then compared the new model to traditional turnover models, concluding that many of their constructs and mechanisms are familiar in the maquiladoras. However, the cultural and economic environment perceived by the workers help determine the precise antecedents, their salience, and the strength of their linkages with turnover. Finally, we suggest how turnover research might be extended to better apply to workers in other cultures.

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1. Introduction

Researchers have invested considerable effort into developing multivariate models to better understand voluntary turnover (Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Maertz & Campion, 1998). However, most of these models have been created and tested in the US,

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Canada, England, and Australia (referred to hereafter as the UCEA). Researchers have argued that such models make parochial assumptions, and thus, may not apply as proposed in other cultures (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991; Hofstede, 1983). This could be the case with UCEA turnover models. However, in turnover research outside the UCEA, there has been little evidence that current models are not applicable or that uniquely different turnover antecedents have emerged. The current study begins to address this question of turnover model applicability. Specifically, in this study, we: (1) describe the maquiladora turnover situation, (2) synthesize worker interview responses into a maquiladora turnover model with propositions to guide future research, (3) compare this model to traditional UCEA turnover models, and (4) make recommendations for cross-cultural turnover modeling. First though, we review research on turnover models, identifying factors that could limit their applicability across cultures.

1.1. Literature review

Most turnover models have included individual job dissatisfaction as a primary catalyst for turnover (e.g., Rosse & Hulin, 1985). Many studies have focused on variations of Mobley's (1977) intermediate linkage model which describes the decision steps between job dissatisfaction and turnover, including a search for and comparison with job alternatives (e.g., Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992; Hom, Griffeth, & Sellaro, 1984). Several models have extended the breadth of antecedents beyond job satisfaction and job alternatives to include organizational commitment (e.g., Bluedorn, 1982; Steers & Mowday, 1981), anticipated future satisfaction with the current organization (e.g., Forrest, Cummings, & Johnson, 1977; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979), and various antecedents of job satisfaction and perceived alternatives (e.g., Price & Mueller, 1981). Researchers have also recognized multiple decision-making paths leading to turnover (e.g., Steers & Mowday, 1981). In the most theoretically advanced model to date, Lee and Mitchell (1994) integrated intermediate linkage models with image theory decision-making models. Besides traditional paths from job dissatisfaction, they proposed a process of matching or screening the current or an alternative job. With such advances in turnover modeling, one might well ask, "why might UCEA turnover models not apply in other cultures?"

First, even the most extensive turnover models (e.g., Bluedorn, 1982; Hom et al., 1984; Mobley et al., 1979; Price & Mueller, 1986) have neglected or underestimated some valid turnover antecedents like relationships with coworkers and leaders, normative expectations, behavioral commitment processes, and perceived reciprocal obligations (Becker, 1992; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Prestholdt, Lane, & Mathews, 1987; Reichers, 1985; Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994). Such deficiencies in UCEA models may make them less applicable if these constructs are equally or more important in other cultures.

Second, UCEA turnover models implicitly assume that turnover decisions are the result of individual choice behavior. However, in collectivist cultures like Mexico (e.g., Diaz-Guerrero, 1967; Hofstede, 1980; Nicholls, Lane, & Brechu, 1999),

in-groups may make or strongly influence the employment decisions of their members (e.g., Young & Fort, 1994). No existing UCEA turnover models posit any such group decision-making processes. The commitment model of Meyer and Allen (1991) includes normative commitment that may be based on socialization and reciprocity, but does not presume direct effects of other people's expectations on turnover (c.f., Prestholdt et al., 1987). Generally, UCEA models propose that an individual's attitudes, goals, and values, rather than other people's expectations drive individual turnover decisions (e.g., Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Mobley, 1977). Given the individualistic societies where they were developed (e.g., Hofstede, 1983), it is not surprising that traditional turnover models have been slow to acknowledge that other people's expectations and desires can directly affect an individual's employment decisions. Thus, the bias in UCEA models toward individual attitudes/goals driving turnover decisions casts some doubt on their applicability in collectivist cultures (e.g., Triandis, 1989).

Finally, the research samples on which UCEA models are developed and validated may significantly differ from typical laborers in other cultures. That is, what UCEA cultures consider as low wage jobs have not been particularly popular samples in their turnover studies, in contrast to nurses, military personnel, and managers (see Hom et al., 1992). This in itself represents a limitation to generalizability. Moreover, unskilled laborers in countries such as India, Mexico, and Indonesia experience generally lower economic development and a different economic frame of reference than in UCEA countries. These workers might view low-wage jobs as being relatively attractive compared to other work options (including unemployment). Thus, the lack of economic development in such countries, combined with cultural value differences between these and UCEA countries (e.g., Hofstede, 1980), may cause workers to have different views on employment and turnover than workers in UCEA samples. These issues cast some doubt on whether findings on UCEA turnover models would generalize to lesser-developed countries.

1.2. The current study

These factors suggest the need to examine the applicability of UCEA turnover models across cultures. We do not presuppose that these factors actually render existing turnover models non-applicable. Realistically, the constructs and linkages in these models probably apply to some degree across cultures. To begin to assess this degree, we inductively develop a model of turnover in the maquiladoras. We then compare it with traditional UCEA models on two dimensions: (1) the nature and salience of antecedent constructs discovered, and (2) the linkages of these constructs to turnover decisions.

To gather the data we use qualitative methods that require considerably fewer assumptions than quantitative surveys about the constructs and processes driving turnover. Moreover, significant illiteracy among maquiladora workers strongly suggests qualitative methods instead of surveys. We do not claim to develop a comprehensive theory of maquiladora turnover. Such an effort would require considerably more empirical findings than are available. Also, we obviously cannot generalize findings

from a single qualitative investigation to the entire population of maquiladora workers. Therefore, we couch our results in terms of a tentative model with propositions and in terms of recommendations for further research.

2. Method

2.1. *Setting and sample*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 47 employees in two different maquiladora plants owned by the same consumer electronics manufacturer in Juarez, Mexico. The sample was 57% female with an average age of 24.3 years. Participants came from two major job categories. Most were unskilled production laborers or “operators” ($n = 37$), from the lowest pay category. The others were semi-skilled laborers in production support or “support operators.” Forty (40) were randomly selected from within these two job categories; 39 participated. One had quit the organization and had not been taken off the employee roll. Three of these happened to be resigning on the day they were interviewed. The remaining respondents were the eight (8) longest tenured operators between the two plants (more than 18 years tenure). They were interviewed to examine instances of long-term retention as well as turnover.

2.2. *Data collection*

2.2.1. *Interviewer*

The interviewer was a bilingual Mexican graduate student attending a regional US university near the border. She was a Juarez native who had worked in the maquiladoras previously and who had experience conducting research interviews. A local, native speaker was indispensable in gaining adequate trust from workers and an accurate understanding of their responses and their perspective. Having an interviewer intimately familiar with both the work culture and the research questions was also vital. In addition to the interviewer’s qualifications, two authors had considerable human resources experience in the maquiladoras, one being bilingual. These factors raised our theoretical sensitivity crucial for qualitative theory-building (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

2.2.2. *Interview questions*

There was a lack of Mexican turnover theory to guide our questioning, so we developed initial interview questions based on our first-hand knowledge of maquiladora turnover and Mexican culture. For example, we knew that maquiladora workers are aware that their coworkers are continuously quitting. Thus, we wanted to ask about their perceptions of why this was happening. Although many maquiladoras in the city of Juarez are constantly hiring, we were still unsure if workers perceived that they had ample alternative job opportunities available. We decided to ask for their perceptions about the availability of alternative jobs locally. We also wanted to know workers’ feelings about their current job and organization. Further,

we wanted them to describe their ideal jobs. We asked to what or whom they are loyal in general and at work. Finally, we asked them about their own personal turnover experiences in the maquiladoras.

These general questions were discussed in detail with the interviewer. Then, specific questions were written in Spanish to best communicate the ideas to the sample. These were back-translated by a professional translator to check for accuracy. Based on three initial pilot interviews (not included in the data reported), the interviewer modified the set of questions further to be more understandable to the workers. See Appendix A for the final questions translated into English. Probing questions were also used where responses were deemed particularly interesting or ambiguous.

2.2.3. Interview procedures

The selected workers were each approached by a clerk from human resources, and they were told that they were chosen to participate in a research interview with a student from a local university. Subjects were informed that interviews were being conducted about working in the maquiladoras and that their responses would not be shared with anyone in the organization. They were then asked whether or not they wanted to participate. Next, they were given a choice of whether or not to be tape-recorded. Although all selected subjects agreed to be interviewed, three chose not to be recorded. The interviews generally lasted about one hour. Recordings were transcribed where available. In the three other cases, notes taken by the interviewer and the bilingual researcher were combined into a single document. A professional translator translated this document into English. This translation was then checked against the Spanish by the interviewer and the bilingual author, but no significant changes were deemed necessary.

2.3. Analyses

We analyzed the final transcripts of the interview data using a variation of grounded theory-building (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This involved developing categories through an iterative process of discovery and confirmation. We examined interview transcripts from beginning to end while identifying and recording as many relevant concepts as possible through line-by-line, open coding. We also recorded direct quotations that expressed these concepts. Second, we inductively combined these concepts into provisional categories (e.g., “key work values”). Third, we systematically reexamined provisional categories during subsequent line-by-line examination of the data, using the principle of constant comparison (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). Provisional categories that did not match examples were eliminated. The remaining categories were further refined by identifying subcategories or dimensions. Finally, during the last pass through the data, we sought quotations either confirming (or disconfirming) relations between subcategories. Those confirmed were included in the final model.

We also recorded frequencies of responses in three key categories. We analyzed all the distinct responses in these key categories, into subcategories and recorded the frequencies. An independent human resources expert (i.e., HR doctoral student) then

sorted the responses within each category into the proposed sub-categories. Absolute agreement between the authors and the expert was calculated. In the category of general loyalties (80 total responses) agreement was 100%. In the category of attachments to the organizations (79 total responses), agreement was 94%. In the category of personal reasons for quitting (42 total responses), agreement was 92%.

3. Maquiladora worker turnover

In the following sections we describe: (1) the worker population and the turnover environment, (2) the types of attachments to the organization and its constituents, (3) and the initiation of turnover. See Fig. 1.

3.1. *Maquiladora workers and the turnover environment*

Relatively inexpensive Mexican labor and relaxed environmental regulations, combined with the passage of NAFTA, has fueled the growth of manufacturing facilities in the Mexican border region. These maquiladoras often experience voluntary turnover rates higher than 100% annually, and as high as 35% per month in some facilities (e.g., Chrispin, 1990; Lucker & Alvarez, 1986). These high rates remain a significant issue in most facilities (Gowan, Ibarreche, & Lackey, 1996; Hom, Grabke, & Gomez-Mejia, 1994; Stephens & Greer, 1995; Warner, 1990).

With respect to the workers, most all are poor by UCEA standards. Since the mid 1980s many facilities in this border area have been constantly hiring laborers, yet most still pay close to the minimum wage (Catanzarite & Strober, 1993). For workers, and operators in particular, there is also limited advancement opportunity with almost no chance of achieving high wage or salaried positions (e.g., supervisor). For example, the long-tenured workers (over 18 years) to whom we talked came in as operators and remained operators throughout their tenure. Further, many workers have migrated from other areas of Mexico and may experience adjustment problems because of separation from family members (Teagarden, Butler, & Von Glinow, 1992). Also, most work for companies owned by non-Mexican interests, and many of the top managers of these facilities are cultural outsiders. With these facts in mind, we examined patterns of workers' reported beliefs and attitudes to understand what factors in the environment may have widespread effects on turnover decisions.

3.1.1. *Beliefs about quitting*

With the very high turnover rates at many facilities (Hom et al., 1994; Lucker & Alvarez, 1986), employees continually witness fellow workers quitting. Regularly observing and hearing accounts of quitting can affect perceptions of this behavior. Namely, a norm may emerge that quitting maquiladora jobs is acceptable behavior (see Abelson, 1993). Alternatively, the sheer amount of turnover in the environment may desensitize workers to this behavior. Either way, it is likely that many employees believe that quitting is perfectly normal, everyday behavior, at least for many of their fellow workers.

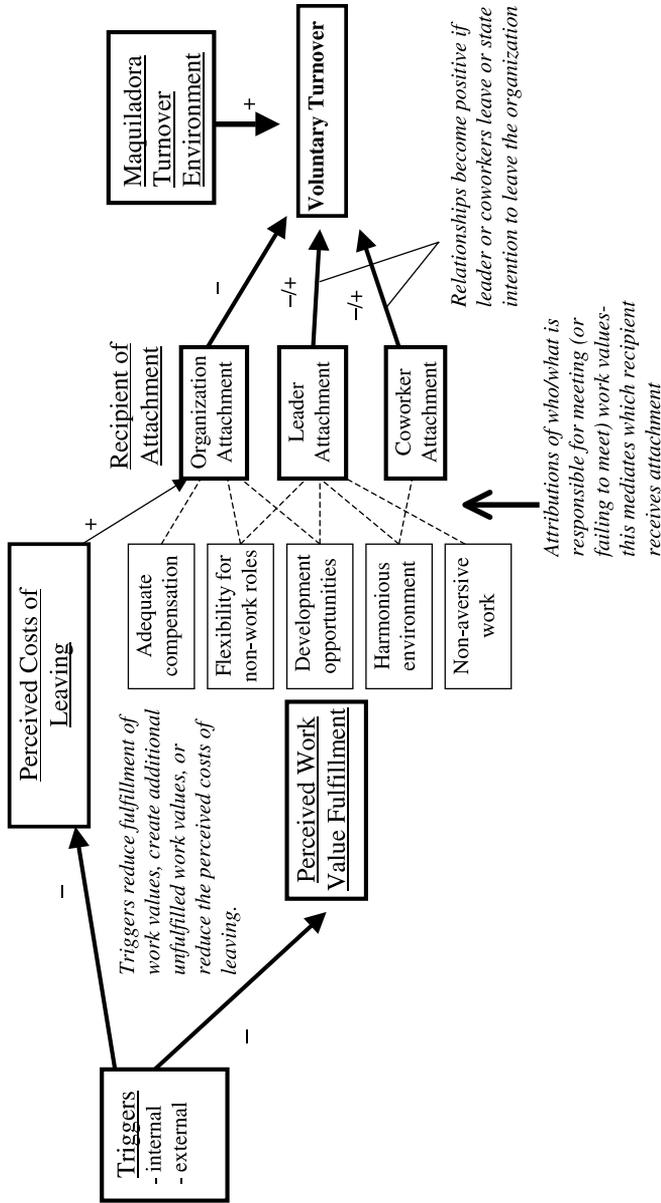


Fig. 1. Model of voluntary turnover for maquiladora workers.

3.1.2. *Beliefs about alternative opportunities*

Fifteen (15) out of 47 subjects mentioned either “the availability of other jobs” or “people searching for other jobs” as reasons for the pervasive turnover in the maquiladoras. We asked participants how long it would take them to secure a job equivalent to their current one. The overall mean ($n = 41$) response was 10.6 days, but 63% indicated that it would take 5 days or less. One reported:

They (operators) are hired almost any place, because they (maquiladoras) don't even ask for a junior high diploma.

Evidently, there is common and well-founded belief that many equivalent maquiladora jobs are readily available, particularly to those willing to work as low-wage operators.

3.1.3. *General attitudes about maquiladora organizations*

Low wages create the well-known labor cost advantage in Mexico that attracts foreign investment. These same forces that create jobs for people migrating from rural areas with few opportunities (e.g., Seligson & Williams, 1981) also ensure that wages remain near the subsistence level. Despite providing jobs, workers do not see maquiladora organizations helping pull them out of poverty:

We earn very little money; we can't make ends meet.

The pay is bad and won't even support a single person.

Another commented on the day of his resignation:

We need a little more help, but that's why companies come to Mexico, to get cheap labor, but I think they could pay a little bit more.

Subsistence level pay seems to be accompanied by a belief that these organizations may not care about workers:

The company should care more about the people because sometimes they don't even know who comes in or goes on vacation.

Companies do not care about the people, but only the work the person does.

It would be wonderful if they appreciated the work you do and if they knew when you are doing good or bad.

It depends on the company. If they treated us as people, they wouldn't act as slave owners.

In light of these perceptions about maquiladora organizations, it is not particularly surprising that only one respondent mentioned the company itself as recipient of loyalty (see Table 1).

3.1.4. *Conclusion*

Beliefs that quitting is acceptable behavior and that many equivalent positions are available, along with negative attitudes toward maquiladora companies may foster an environment of low commitment to maquiladora organizations in general. We propose that this environment may reduce hesitations about quitting and make quitting a more salient option in many workers' minds. In this environment which seems

Table 1
General loyalties

Subcategories	Frequency of response	Percentage of total responses (%)
Family members	31	38.8
Friends and neighbors	10	12.5
Their work	10	12.5
Supervisor or group leader	7	8.8
Career goals or studies	6	7.5
People who are loyal to me	6	7.5
Coworkers	4	5.0
People in need	2	2.5
God	1	1.3
The country	1	1.3
The company	1	1.3
Others	1	1.3

to facilitate turnover, the reasons why workers stay at a particular organization (see Table 2) may be more informative than reasons why they quit.

3.2. Attachments to the organization and its constituents

In analyzing responses, we tried to understand the potential bonds to an organization that can resist the prevailing environmental forces facilitating turnover. Two overall categories emerged: perceived costs of leaving the organization and fulfillment of work values. First, workers believe that leaving an organization can imply costs that they may want to avoid. These costs arise from at least two main sources.

Table 2
Organizational attachments

Subcategories	Frequency of response	Percentage of total responses ^a %
I must make a living somewhere	10	12.6
Like the job/easy work	10	12.6
Plant close to home	9	11.4
Good relations with coworkers	8	10.1
Don't want to search for another job	8	10.1
Like the environment	7	8.9
Good relations with supervisors	5	6.3
To gain opportunities for future promotions	5	6.3
Good flexibility to pursue studies	3	3.8
Good compensation	3	3.8
Poor opportunities Elsewhere	3	3.8
Convenient schedule	2	2.5
Responsibility to the company	1	1.3
Cafeteria	1	1.3

^a Only agreements are reported so percentages do not total 100%.

First, company seniority can lead to a better chance of promotion, particularly for male support operators:

I like to build up seniority with a company, because that's the basis for moving up if there are opportunities for a promotion.

Time spent in the organization appears to be an investment in advancement which some workers are unwilling to give up. Second, not wanting to search for another job was mentioned as a reason for staying with the current organization (10% of responses). As two workers put it:

I want to start at another place but I have been comfortable here. Each year I think I won't continue here and then another year passes by.

I don't like to be looking for other jobs, maybe because I don't like bothering with the paperwork.

Some workers evidently believe that obtaining another job, while possible, is not worth the effort. The sacrifice of comfort and habit for change, along with the effort required in finding another job, act as costs to be avoided. Avoiding these costs of leaving implies some desire to stay with the current organization, or psychological attachment, that resists the environmental forces favoring turnover.

Proposition 1. *Beliefs that leaving the organization would bring about costs in seniority benefits or job change inertia will lead to psychological attachment to the organization.*

The second category of attachment involved work values. People want certain values met through work. If such values are fulfilled, employees can become more attached:

You might be satisfied with work if you earned a little more and were treated well, you wouldn't go out looking for another job.

But what exactly are the important values for maquiladora workers? The five sub-categories that emerged and quotations that illustrate and support each are provided in Table 3.

First, maquiladora workers know when they apply that their rate of pay will be low in absolute terms, but they certainly want as much as possible. From responses though, whether compensation is judged as adequate seems to be partly based on whether pay level meets family financial needs. Second is the extent that a job allows flexibility to pursue interests outside of work. In particular, female respondents indicated that they wanted their job to allow them to fulfill family responsibilities such as taking care of children or other family members. For males, the value of flexibility seemed to lie more in the ability to attend school or other non-work activities. Given the tedious nature of many jobs in the maquiladoras and the traditional Mexican philosophy of "working to live" instead of "living to work" (Diaz-Guerrero, 1967; Stephens & Greer, 1995), it is not surprising that jobs are evaluated in terms of flexibility for non-work interests. The third value focused on self-improvement. Despite limited promotion opportunities, maquiladora workers still value development op-

Table 3
Work value subcategories and supportive quotations

Value	Worker quote
Adequate compensation	Work is my means of support for my family I must work to support my children
Flexibility for non-work activity	For me the perfect job would be staying at home and having a home-based business so I could take care of my children I've heard of good companies that are flexible in terms of schedules when dealing with students
Development opportunities	My goal is to be a mechanic or warehouse clerk I don't like the fact that there is no opportunity; people aren't motivated to keep going. . . I haven't had the opportunity to be promoted yet; people try to obtain a job where they can grow and develop and make more I like it (this job) because I'm learning a lot about electronics, which is what I'm studying
Harmonious Work Environment	There are a lot of inconveniences, like for example, everyone's telling you what you have to do so there is always conflict and you get caught in the middle Because of the environment, I feel at ease Companionship, to be united, supporting of each other. As long as there is companionship, everything will be fine
Non-aversive work assignments	There would be better conditions. More comfort in the work area since I have to stand all day, chairs that can be adjusted, to have air conditioning There is a lot of work. I don't like my current area because of the pressure when we get backed up I like the operation I do because it's not difficult. What I don't like are the cables that at times don't go together easily

portunities leading to upward economic and social mobility (Stephens & Greer, 1995) and personal improvement. Fourth, “ambiente,” the Spanish word for “environment,” was used widely by respondents to indicate another value, specifically, a harmonious environment. One worker said, “it's the people around you who make for a good environment.” Seemingly, having friendly and cooperative relations best characterizes a harmonious environment. These findings further support that low conflict, polite interaction, and prevailing good feelings are key values in Mexico (de-Forest, 1994; Kras, 1995; Teagarden et al., 1992). Fifth, most maquiladora workers are accustomed to working in routine support and assembly line jobs. Operators often have less than six years of formal education and may not expect or want complex jobs (e.g., Lucker & Alvarez, 1986). When describing their work, respondents mentioned the desire to avoid physically aversive tasks and working conditions more than a desire for challenging assignments.

As we examined these value subcategories, the key question arose, “Who or what is seen to fulfill which work values?” It became evident that certain sources were consistently mentioned or implied to fulfill (or potentially fulfill) certain values. In other

words, respondents' statements seemed to attribute fulfillment of values (or lack thereof) to specific sources. These source subcategories included the organization itself, leaders, and coworkers. We show linkages between values and sources with illustrative quotes in Table 4.

These responses yielded another key insight as well. Source(s) that are seen as responsible for fulfilling or failure to fulfill values, in turn, receive loyalty/attachment or blame/withdrawal. This implies that if supervisors or coworkers are seen to fulfill values, loyalty to these sources would increase, but organizational loyalty may not.

Proposition 2. *Attributions that the organization, leaders, or coworkers have fulfilled one or more of the key work values will lead to psychological attachment to that source.*

3.2.1. Organizational attachment

Compensation value fulfillment was linked consistently to the organization. Another aspect that was indisputably linked to the company itself is the plant's location. This is particularly important in the maquiladoras because most workers do not own cars. One worker said, "I woke up at 4:00am since there was only one bus that left at 4:30." Since morning shifts usually begin from 6:00–7:00 am, taking a bus at 4:30 am implies considerably more time away from home and family than if the person could easily walk to work. The value of flexibility for non-work roles can be at least partially met through a convenient plant location, but not for workers who live a good distance from the plant. Respondents also indicated that training opportunities are at least partly associated with the organization itself, meeting the value of development opportunities.

In summary, there is some evidence that the organization itself may be seen to affect adequate pay, flexibility for non-work activity, and development opportunities. Thus, if workers attribute fulfillment of one or more of these work values to the organization, psychological attachment to it may result. We primarily saw evidence of this type of attachment within responses of the long-tenured operators. They began working for the company when far fewer jobs were available in the 1970s, possibly creating feelings of gratitude toward the organization. To have stayed this long with many alternative jobs seemingly available may have committed these employees to believing that the organization is fulfilling their values (e.g., Salancik, 1977). For most employees who have much less history in the maquiladoras, attachment to an organization may only last until another organization promises to meet key values better:

We can't say all of us are loyal to the company because all of a sudden there will be a time when you just can't be loyal; you can't afford to be loyal.

Thus, attachment to the organization may dissipate quickly. In light of negative attitudes toward maquiladoras and only one unprompted response mentioning organizational loyalty, it appears that attachment to the organization is non-affective and somewhat tenuous, except for the long-tenured operators who have perceived value-fulfillment by the organization over a long period.

Table 4
 Quotes expressing linkages between work values and sources of potential value fulfillment

Work value source linkages	Example quotations expressing linkages
Adequate compensation organization	If I found another place (company) that paid better and gave more bonuses, I'd leave immediately I would leave, but if I were going to a place that paid the same, then I would rather stay
Flexibility for non-work activity–leader	The one I had in the beginning I didn't like because of the permissions; she never paid any attention to us and it was as if she'd get angry because we'd ask for permission to miss work and it shouldn't be that way because I know when I have to miss work and I am very responsible about it They (leaders) give you permission to miss work when you need it I asked for permission once to miss work and they gave me a hard time, lots of paperwork and forms Before I had a supervisor that gave permission to be absent for 1 1/2 weeks The supervisor hardly ever gives me permission to miss work and I don't like the way he is towards me He (my supervisor) helps me if I'm absent; he doesn't penalize me by taking a day off if I'm late; he supports me a lot
Flexibility for non-work activity organization	Here I don't need to hurry a lot because everything is so near and since I have children that's a good thing It's close to my house; I can walk to and from the plant I've heard of good companies that are flexible in terms of schedules when dealing with students I need to study in order to get experience. . . I have flexibility to study here
Development opportunities–leader	I hope they (supervisors) promote me to another department; I don't want to stay very long in the same place because I want to learn and apply my knowledge I would like for our work to get noticed a little more so we could advance based on our own merit At times what I don't like is that they change us to another line and the new operation is more difficult, but still I go because the leader says that if I help him now he will help me later
Development opportunities–organization	I want to develop myself and you can see where there's a future and where there isn't. Here at (current company) I expect to last a little bit longer My (group) leader has just finished college and they (the company) gave him an opportunity to better himself; I would like the same for me too I haven't been working here long, but it seems to me that I'm learning a lot. I've never worked at such a large company and I think it's good here We have the chance to learn the CNC machine, so that allows us to know this type of machine and computers and you can benefit from that; we've been sent to several courses

Table 4 (continued)

Work value source linkages	Example quotations expressing linkages
Harmonious work environment–leader	<p>I would not be loyal when leaders criticize people a lot or they demand too much</p> <p>I would like her (the group leader) to greet us and not walk by us as if we were nothing... A greeting would feel good and generate more trust</p> <p>(I would like) To have better leaders who are friendly and not arrogant</p> <p>Maybe (I have stayed) because up until now I have been lucky enough to have good supervisors and group leaders</p>
Harmonious work environment–coworkers	<p>I like the environment, because of my coworkers; I like that I get along with them and talk to everyone, and that they say 'hi' when I pass by</p> <p>People want good workmates, friendly leaders, no gossip</p> <p>To get along better with the workmates so that we do a better job</p> <p>Almost everybody treats me very well, except one girl; when she gets mad at someone, she throws papers and interrupts our conversations</p> <p>I see them (coworkers) as part of my family because I spend time with them and there is bonding between us</p> <p>I like it (current job) because my workmates are nice; we get along well with each other. There are no fights and they worry when we are absent; they call home to find out why I was absent</p>
Non-aversive work assignments–leader	<p>Group leaders changed me to an area that affects my health because my waist is not in good condition and that's why I asked for a change from this area</p> <p>He doesn't pressure us a lot; he asks me if I know an operation and if I want to help him in something else, and if I want to, it's fine, if I don't that's fine also</p> <p>I like the work. I like it, but when you're working one area, sometimes they change you to another area all of a sudden and you feel bad even though you are here to work in any area</p> <p>After a while you get bored of the same job. Due to this, you get tired and then you get disappointed and then you start making mistakes and that is when the supervisor gets on you</p> <p>When someone asks him (the supervisor) for a line change he doesn't give approval</p>

3.2.2. Leader attachment

In contrast to the organization itself, leaders and coworkers were mentioned specifically as recipients of loyalty by nearly 14% of respondents (see Table 1) and as reasons for staying at the organization by over 16% of respondents. Employees suggested that supervisors or group leaders controlled flexibility in scheduling, development opportunities, relations in the work environment, and work assignments (see

Table 4). Thus, leaders may receive loyalty or blame when these values are met or remain unmet. Beyond indirect value fulfillment, workers told of leaders directly intervening to encourage their retention:

One day I tried to quit my job here and my supervisor talked to me to find out the reason and to see if he could solve the problem, so I saw their interest in me and I stayed.

It seems that by simply showing a personal interest in an employee the leader may influence his/her turnover decision.

3.2.3. Coworker attachment

Because relationships with people “make the environment,” coworkers help meet the value of a harmonious work environment, creating attachment to them. Making friends at work seems to be a key source of this perceived harmony and attachment:

I consider them (coworkers) friends, maybe this is why people at ____ (this company) last a long time, partly due to friendship.

3.2.4. Conclusion

Psychological attachments to the organization itself, to leaders, or to coworkers can act as anchors against the environmental factors pulling workers toward turnover. However, several factors point to leader attachment as the most salient type of attachment for these workers. The Mexican work culture tends to accept relatively large power differences between superiors and subordinates (Diaz-Guerrero, 1967; Hofstede, 1980), which may imply more specific expectations for leader behavior than in individualist countries (e.g., Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994). Well-developed expectations might make leader relations more salient for employment decisions (deForest, 1994; Kras & Whatley, 1990; Kras, 1995; Stephens & Greer, 1995). Responses suggest that these attachments to constituents may be more salient than organizational loyalty. For example:

The workmates and the supervisor are what make you loyal to the company. If I had to choose between ____ (current company), a new supervisor, new workmates, another company, the present supervisor, or buddies at ____ (current company), then it would depend on my relationship with my workmates—if it were good, then I would stay, but if not, then I would leave.

Finally, compared to coworkers, leaders were consistently linked to fulfillment of more work values (4 vs.1). Based on these observations, we propose that:

Proposition 3. *Leader attachment level will be a stronger predictor of turnover than organization attachment level and coworker attachment level.*

3.3. Triggers initiating turnover

While attachments to constituents or the organization itself produce resistance against the turnover facilitators in the environment, we discovered that certain

Table 5
Personal reasons for quitting/triggers

Subcategories	Frequency of response	Percentage of total responses ^a (%)
Conflict with supervisor or group leader	7	16.7
Received Physically Aversive Work Assignment	5	11.9
Quit to Fulfill Family Responsibilities	5	11.9
Plant Too Far from Home	4	9.8
Conflict with Coworkers	4	9.8
Quit for a Better Job	3	7.3
Inconvenient Work Schedule	3	7.3
Family Relocation	2	4.9
Poor Opportunity for Development	2	4.9
Poor Compensation	2	4.9
Quit to Attend School	2	4.9

^a Only agreements are reported so percentages do not total 100%.

events or realizations (referred to as “triggers”) can reduce or dissolve these attachments. Trigger experiences reduce costs of leaving, reduce fulfillment of work values (e.g., receiving a bad work assignment), increase unfulfilled work values (e.g., receiving a bad work assignment, birth of a child), reduce existing attachments directly (e.g., a conflict with a supervisor), and/or increase attraction to alternatives (e.g., receiving a job offer). Reasons given for leaving past jobs are displayed in Table 5.

We identified two main sub-categories of triggers in the data: those that relate to the work setting (internal) and those that relate to non-work (external) factors. The most frequently mentioned internal trigger was a conflict with the immediate supervisor or group leader. Conflict with leaders and with coworkers together accounted for nearly 27% of responses:

Because I had problems with the supervisor. It was difficult because the supervisor wanted to go out with me and I didn't want to, and after I got pregnant they wouldn't let me stay at work.

I had a problem with one of my workmates; he blamed me for a nasty joke, but I didn't do it, and one woman told her supervisor, and I was moved.

As implied in this second quote, receiving a change in work assignment (another frequent trigger) involved a potential conflict with the supervisor as well as with the coworker.

Proposition 4. *Conflicts with leaders and coworkers will be the most common internal triggers for turnover behavior.*

As for external triggers, over 50% of respondents mentioned that they knew others who had quit for family reasons and 17% of all personal reasons for quitting related directly to family. These primarily included having to care for parents or children:

When my son was born I couldn't find anyone to take care of him.

Because of problems with the marriage, home, child sickness, and the only time that I quit a job was due to all the criticism from everyone.

One respondent's husband reportedly prohibited her from working. Three other frequently mentioned reasons were family relocation, the plant being too far from home, and inconvenient work schedule. These relate to the ability to meet family responsibilities as well.

Learning of a better alternative was also frequently mentioned as an external trigger. Two workers who were quitting on that day said that they were leaving because they knew of jobs outside the maquiladoras that paid more, one in construction and the other in a cafeteria.

Proposition 5. *Events related to increasing family responsibilities and alternative job information will be the most common external triggers for turnover behavior.*

3.4. Summary

The current model proposes that norms of acceptance toward turnover behavior, beliefs that maquiladora jobs are readily available, and negative or ambivalent attitudes toward maquiladora organizations in general create an environment where quitting is an ever-present option in the minds of workers. This tendency is opposed by psychological attachments formed through the desire to avoid the perceived costs of leaving and through perceiving that some facet of the organization has fulfilled work values. Responsibility for work-value fulfillment may be attributed to leaders, to coworkers, and/or to the organization itself. The source perceived to cause value fulfillment (or lack thereof) receives the commensurate increase (or reduction) in psychological attachment. The number and strength of attachments determine an employee's susceptibility to turnover at a given point in time. Attachments may be reduced or eliminated by triggers. Triggers create perceptions of unfulfilled work values, increase one's attraction to an alternative role/job, or otherwise decrease psychological attachments. When a trigger sufficiently reduces existing attachments at the organization, the employee quits.

3.5. Comparison to UCEA models

In general, our proposed model for the maquiladoras contains many constructs very similar or identical to those in UCEA turnover models and commitment research. First, perceived and actual alternatives help drive turnover decisions in both our model and in the UCEA literature (Gerhart, 1990; Hom et al., 1992; Steel & Griffeth, 1989). Perceived costs of leaving (i.e., behavioral/continuance commitment; Becker, 1960; Meyer & Allen, 1984) are also very familiar in the UCEA literature. Work values of compensation, development, and work itself are long-studied facets of job satisfaction in the JDI (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969). Value-fulfillment as a mechanism leading to satisfaction and attachment has been a staple of the UCEA work attitude research for many years (Locke, 1976). The idea of trigger experiences are largely similar to Lee and Mitchell's (1994) "shocks" that initiate several decision paths in their model. Finally, attachment to supervisors and coworkers has been specifically recognized in the commitment and LMX/TMX literatures (Becker, 1992;

Clugston, Howell, & Dorfman, 2000; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Seers, 1989), but omitted from traditional turnover models.

Despite these considerable similarities, there are several important differences between the proposed model and UCEA turnover models. Specifically, several constructs discovered are not present in these models. First, an inertial resistance to job search and job change acted as a cost of quitting to be avoided, causing attachment to the current organization. Although reminiscent of continuance commitment and low motivation for job search, respondents seemed to focus on avoiding discomfort more than losing side bets or lacking efficacy for search. This inertia seems to be born out of the belief that any small benefit from changing jobs would be more than offset by the hassles inherent in the change process (e.g., transportation difficulties, paperwork, medical examinations, interruption in pay, and leaving the comfort of a familiar work situation). Staying because leaving is too much of a bother is a concept not present in UCEA models. In addition, UCEA models have not specifically included a harmonious work environment as value affecting turnover decisions.

Second, although non-work influences have been recognized in UCEA models (Hom et al., 1984) and demographic indicators of family responsibility have been weakly but significantly linked to turnover (e.g., Cotton & Tuttle, 1986), family concerns have not been a primary antecedent in turnover models. But in worker responses, the influence of family was pervasive, as recipient of loyalty and frequently mentioned reason for staying or quitting. We also discovered that flexibility for family caregiving and other non-work activities was a key work value. Given the multiple influences of family in our model, their absence as determinants of turnover in traditional UCEA models is particularly striking.

Notable differences also exist with respect to relations between some constructs and turnover. In most UCEA models, global perceived alternatives have a direct effect on individual turnover/intention or moderate satisfaction-turnover relationships (Hom et al., 1992; Maertz & Campion, 1998). In our model, perceived alternative jobs for most workers are limited in scope and level, but jobs are readily available in the maquiladoras to those willing to work as operators. This pervasiveness of near minimum wage jobs is so well-known that it contributes to a relatively uniform perception effect favoring turnover, as workers think and tell each other, "I can always find another job." Also, information about a specific alternative, particularly outside the maquiladoras, may act as a proximal trigger for turnover. Future research should investigate the possible dual effects of general perceptions of job market options vs. perceiving that a specific, attractive alternative job is available (Michaels & Spector, 1982). These imply a more complex relationship between alternatives and turnover than is indicated in most UCEA models.

UCEA research has almost universally accepted organizational commitment as a potent antecedent of turnover (e.g., Bluedorn, 1982; Griffeth et al., 2000; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). It has even been speculated that collectivism may even enhance such organizational commitment (Randall, 1993). Our data indicates that there is potential for the organization to elicit attachment directly through costs of leaving and fulfilling work values of compensation, development opportunities, and to a lesser extent, flexibility for non-work activities. However, respondents generally indicated

that maquiladora organizations often do not meet these values adequately. Moreover, high collectivism in Mexico should only enhance the level or importance of organizational commitment where the organization is seen as an in-group (Triandis, 1989). We found no consistent evidence that maquiladora workers see the organization as an in-group. If the organization is not an in-group, collectivism may even contribute to low organizational attachment or render it less effective for explaining withdrawal behavior than it is in individualist cultures (see Triandis, 1989). Flynn (1994) suggested that it is difficult to forge loyalty to a maquiladora company even at upper management levels, perhaps because collectivism may not extend far beyond the family in Mexico (Paik & Teagarden, 1995). Together these factors point to reduced salience of affective organizational attachment and possibly reduced variance in the construct. Therefore, contrary to UCEA turnover research, our data offer no reason to expect strong relations between affective organizational commitment and turnover in the maquiladoras.

In contrast, these findings are consistent with current UCEA research on the “pro-*tean*” (Hall & Moss, 1998) or “boundaryless” career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). This stream maintains that unquestioning loyalty to the company is outmoded and should be secondary to the individual’s personal development and adaptability. Although our sample shows signs of valuing flexibility for non-work concerns over organizational loyalty (e.g., Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), maquiladora workers (and organizations) differ from the self-actualizing continuous learners described by Hall and Moss (partly because of their more limited educational and economic opportunities). Nevertheless, the lesson for turnover research both from our study and the career research is clear. Assumptions that organizational commitment will be and will remain a primary explanation of turnover behavior must be reexamined.

If the organization itself is often seen as a distant, unresponsive entity to which only tentative attachments are possible, it makes sense that workers would focus on whether more concrete elements of their work experience are meeting work values. The data indicate that leaders and coworkers are among these more concrete elements. In the UCEA research, commitment to leaders and coworkers have been recognized as turnover antecedents (Clugston et al., 2000). However, organizational commitment has generally been a stronger predictor of turnover than leader and coworker variables (Griffeth et al., 2000). Also, research has concluded that organizational commitment most likely mediates the effects of constituent commitments on outcomes, having no direct effects on turnover intentions (Hunt & Morgan, 1994). Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997) found that exchanges with the leader and organization are distinct, but reciprocally causal of each other, implying that exchange with the leader causes perceived organization support, and in turn, organizational commitment. Thus, in the UCEA literature, the implication is that constituent commitments are subordinate and dependent on organizational commitment in their influence on turnover. Our findings suggest that this is not the case for maquiladora workers. Contrary to UCEA research, leaders (and to a lesser extent coworkers) overshadowed the organization with respect to attachment potential.

The method in which attachments form to constituents is absent in UCEA turnover models, but has been discussed in commitment research. Becker (1992)

proposed identification, value congruence, and compliance as bases of constituent commitments. Clugston et al. (2000) measured affective, continuance, and normative components of constituent commitments. However, no study has specifically addressed the process by which attachment is formed to the organization vs. one of its constituents. Attributions of cause to leaders and coworkers for work outcomes has been a familiar notion for many years in the UCEA literature (e.g., Wilhelm, Herd, & Steiner, 1993), but attributions have not been offered as an explanation for whether attachment goes to the organization vs. a constituent. In contrast, we propose that such attributions of responsibility for fulfilling (or failing to fulfill) key work values determines whether the employee becomes attached to (or withdraws from) the organization or to leaders/coworkers.

Finally, besides being attributed responsibility for meeting work values, several respondents mentioned another way in which leaders and coworkers can promote retention. Direct behavioral intervention by leaders and coworkers encouraged them to stay at their jobs. However, no UCEA turnover model has proposed or explored whether supervisor or coworker interventions like comforting people and encouraging them to stay may directly cause retention.

3.6. Recommendations for research

One obvious implication of this study is for future turnover studies in the Mexican maquiladoras to confirm our proposed constructs and test our model linkages and propositions with quantitative measures. While examining our data in light of employee family demographics, an intriguing possibility emerged. Namely, it seemed that whether the employee had high vs. low family financial and caregiving responsibilities might moderate some of our model parameters. Thus, future research should investigate whether an employee's configuration of breadwinner and caregiver family responsibilities help determine which work values are relatively most salient, and in turn, which type of psychological attachments and turnover triggers are more or less likely to occur.

Besides these directions, our findings suggest some recommendations for future turnover modeling efforts. These recommendations are primarily meant for turnover research in samples with basic economic and cultural characteristics in common with our sample.

(1) Commitment constructs should be fully integrated with traditional turnover models. (2) Studies should model the relative influence of constituent vs. organizational commitment on turnover. (3) Researchers should attempt to model the contingent nature of constituent commitments on turnover behavior. See Fig. 1. (4) It seems that value fulfillment may lead to attachment across cultures, but the exact value content or value level expected may vary across cultures (e.g., Davidson, Jaccard, Triandis, Morales, & Diaz-Guerrero, 1976). With this in mind, future models should include the work value of flexibility for non-work activities and harmonious work environment as well as more traditional work values. (5) Models should expand their focus beyond attitudes and values as the driving forces in turnover decisions to include normative beliefs as some have done (e.g., Prestholdt et al., 1987). This means

including constructs and measures capturing the expectations that the employee perceives from others (especially in-group members) with respect to his/her turnover behavior. (6) Models should expand their focus to include the many potential influences of family issues on turnover.

3.7. Limitations

One limitation of the present study involves the potential for cultural bias, despite care to minimize its impact. We employed a native interviewer with work experience in the maquiladoras who helped us compose the actual questions and understand responses. Nevertheless, we brought knowledge to the study based on studies conducted in UCEA countries. In other words, we may have tended to fit interview information into already existing mental categories or schemas based on constructs and relationships in the existing literature. Thus, we cannot rule out the possibility of some bias in favor of finding familiar constructs in the data. Moreover, we drew our conclusions based on a small number of participants. Although most were chosen at random, they are not representative of all maquiladora workers, particularly those in facilities away from the border where the labor environment is different. In addition, we cannot be precise about whether our findings that differed from UCEA models were due to the variant job types (i.e., extremely low-wage) from those typically examined in development of UCEA models or due to cultural differences between Mexico and UCEA countries. Also, we cannot rule out that some of our unique findings are a function of the methodology employed. That is, if UCEA turnover research had utilized richer qualitative methods, some additional findings similar to ours may have been incorporated in UCEA models (e.g., non-work influences). Finally, this study has the considerable limitations to generalizability that accompany all single-country studies. To truly differentiate the effects of cultural dimensions, economic development, job type, and research method on turnover behavior, multi-factor/multi-method research must be undertaken.

3.8. Conclusion

Despite these limitations, the current study makes several contributions. First, we provide a framework to better understand voluntary turnover among maquiladora workers and guide turnover research in Mexico. Second, we provide a comparison between our model and traditional UCEA models, concluding that the antecedent constructs in the UCEA literature generally seem to apply in our sample (although several important constructs that we uncovered are absent in UCEA models). However, cultural and economic environment may affect the precise content associated with these constructs and the nature of their linkages to turnover. Third, we recommend how UCEA turnover models can be expanded to better apply across cultures, particularly in environments similar to those experienced by maquiladora workers. Finally, we hopefully generate new ideas and concepts that will stimulate turnover research in general.

Appendix A

Interview questions

- Please provide: basic demographics, residence, marital status, and number of dependents
 - Tell me about your current job. What do you think about your job generally?
 - Suppose you had a magic wand and could create the ideal job, what would it be like?
 - Which aspects of the work would be the most important for you?
 - Why do you think there is so much turnover in the maquiladoras?
 - Think of three people who quit recently. Why did they quit? What happened?
 - When you began working in a maquiladora how long did you expect it to last? Why?
 - Why have you not quit this company when many people already have?
 - Have you ever quit a job? If so, why? If not, tell us about another person. What happened?
 - Was there something the company could have done to retain you (or the other person)?
 - How long did you (or the other person) think about quitting?
 - What were the steps that happened before you (or he/she) quit?
 - How many opportunities are there for you to get a job equal or better than your current job?
 - Suppose you had to find a job equal or better than your current one. How long do you think it would take to get one? Days, weeks, months?
 - When you think of loyalty, what do you understand that it is?
 - To what or whom are you loyal?
 - With respect to work, to what or whom are you loyal? Why are you loyal to those people or things you just mentioned?
-

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