



# Work satisfaction, organizational commitment and withdrawal behaviours

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The focus of this research paper is on the effects of work satisfaction and organizational commitment on withdrawal behaviours. In order to acquire a better understanding of this relationship, the moderating effects of work satisfaction and organizational commitment are examined.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A questionnaire study was undertaken with Dutch and Slovakian respondents.

**Findings** – Although the results do yield support for the claim that work satisfaction and organizational commitment have moderating effects on withdrawal behaviours, not all the hypotheses were confirmed, particularly in the case of sample two.

**Research limitations/implications** – Although a cross-sectional design was used, light was shed on the complex relationship between work satisfaction, organizational commitment and withdrawal behaviours.

**Practical implications** – The results suggest that targeting one employee attitude in order to prevent withdrawal behaviours may not be enough. It is recommended to focus on a combined pattern of attitudes to obtain the desired goals.

**Originality/value** – Rather than concentrating on single relationships, this paper examines the effects of two employee attitudes on withdrawal behaviours, taking into account moderator effects.

**Keywords** Job satisfaction, Absenteeism, Employee turnover, Employee behaviour, Employee relations

## Paper type

## Introduction

In the study of the HRM-performance link, researchers assume that HRM practices and systems do not directly influence organizational performance but that the link between HRM and performance is created indirectly via employee attitudes and behaviours (Delery, 1998). For example, the concept of “soft” HRM suggests that the use of appropriate HRM practices generates favourable employee attitudes, which then result in improved performance (Edgar and Geare, 2005). This highlights the importance of employees’ attitudes. Examples of attitudes that are influenced by HRM practices are organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Meyer, 1997; Edgar and Geare, 2005; Rayton, 2006). When focusing on the link between attitudes and performance, we find that affective organizational commitment has been shown to be an important predictor of organizational outcomes (see, for example, meta-analysis by Meyer *et al.*, 2002). The same link with organizational outcomes can be found for job satisfaction, although the connection to organizational outcomes is more indirect (Dipboye *et al.*, 1994; Spector, 1997). Thus, from a HRM perspective, employee attitudes and behaviours are of interest due to their possible contributions to the over-all functioning of the organization.

One way of approaching the concept of performance is to examine withdrawal behaviours. Withdrawal behaviours are defined as behaviours involving physical



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withdrawal, such as absenteeism and turnover. Organizations are particularly motivated to understand these behaviours, as they result in high costs (Rosse and Noel, 1996). Consequently, withdrawal behaviours have become important objects of study in HRM research.

The process model developed by Steers and Rhodes (1978) in which job satisfaction and organizational commitment are considered to play a role in employee attendance is an example of such HRM research examining withdrawal behaviours. In spite of such studies, the empirical evidence concerning the relationship between withdrawal behaviours and employee attitudes continues to be mixed and modest at best (Dipboye *et al.*, 1994; Hackett, 1989; Meyer, 1997; Rosse and Noel, 1996; Spector, 1997). In a recent meta-analysis, Harrison *et al.* (2006) report small to medium correlations between job satisfaction/commitment with absenteeism, with some of the respective confidence intervals including zero. Consequently, in this paper, we intend to examine the effects of these two employee attitudes on withdrawal behaviours further, taking into account possible moderator effects.

## **Employee attitudes**

### *Job satisfaction*

Job satisfaction is a construct that has often been described, discussed and researched. There are many theories concerning the causal relationship between motives, behaviour and proceeds. For example, job satisfaction can be seen as a result of a behavioural cycle; it can be seen as a cause of behaviour; or it can be seen as part of a regulation system in which the evaluation of results leads to decisions concerning whether or not changes are to be made (Thierry, 1997). These underlying theories influence the definitions of job satisfaction. Some definitions involve a differentiated approach in which job satisfaction is seen as consisting of satisfaction with different aspects of the job and the work situation. In this approach, job satisfaction is assessed by totalling the satisfaction reported for many different aspects of the job and the work situation. Such an assessment gives an accurate picture of the employees' total job satisfaction. Consequently, in our study, we assessed job satisfaction using several facets of the job and the work situation.

### *Organizational commitment*

In the past, many definitions of organizational commitment have been described and investigated. Some of these definitions concern different dimensions of organizational commitment. As Meyer and Allen (1991) outline, commitment consists of three dimensions, namely, affective, normative and continuance commitment. Affective organizational commitment is defined as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and commitment to an organization. Three aspects characterize affective commitment: the acceptance of organizational goals and values, the willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization and the intention to remain in the organization (Dipboye *et al.*, 1994; McCaul *et al.*, 1995).

Continuance commitment refers to the commitment employees experience towards the organization because of investments they have made or because of the costs associated with leaving the organization (Dipboye *et al.*, 1994; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). This form of commitment develops when employees realize that they have accumulated investments they would lose if they left the organization or because their alternatives are limited.

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The difference between affective commitment and continuance commitment is that employees high in affective commitment stay with the organization because they want to, while employees high in continuance commitment stay because they have to (Meyer *et al.*, 1990). Meyer and Allen (1991) have identified a third dimension of organizational commitment, which they describe as normative commitment. This form of commitment concerns a feeling of (moral) obligation to remain in the organization. What these three dimensions have in common is that they all indicate the extent to which employees are willing to remain in an organization. We adopted this three-dimensional approach for our study because it is often used in the definition of organizational commitment. Consequently, we can compare the results of our study with others in the field.

#### *The relationship between job satisfaction and commitment*

The relationship between organizational commitment and job satisfaction has been investigated extensively (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Prior research indicates that there is a high correlation between the two concepts (Dipboye *et al.*, 1994; Meyer, 1997; Sagie, 1998; Tett and Meyer, 1993). However, the two work attitudes are regarded as separate constructs (Russell and Price, 1988). Job satisfaction refers to an emotional state of mind that reflects an affective reaction to the job and the work situation, whereas the focus of organizational commitment is on a more global reaction (emotional or non-emotional) to the entire organization (Dipboye *et al.*, 1994; Farkas and Tetrick, 1989; Lance, 1991; Russell and Price, 1988). Consequently, organizational commitment is less influenced by daily events, develops over a longer period and is therefore, more stable than job satisfaction (Sagie, 1998; Dipboye *et al.*, 1994).

Although there is relative consensus on the strength of the relationship between job satisfaction and commitment, there is ongoing debate about the direction of that relationship. Some authors claim that satisfaction is an antecedent of commitment (Stevens *et al.*, 1978; Williams and Hazer, 1986). Others regard commitment as the cause of satisfaction (Bateman and Strasser, 1984). A third position sees the relationship as being a reciprocal one (Lance, 1991; Price and Mueller, 1981). The relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment appears therefore to be very complex and may even vary over time (Meyer, 1997; Farkas and Tetrick, 1989).

#### *The relationship between job satisfaction, commitment and withdrawal behaviours*

The apparent complexity of the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment mentioned above makes further investigation continue to be of interest. This is especially true when it comes to their mutual effects on outcome variables. The results of research on the effects of job satisfaction and organizational commitment on organizational performance are weak and even contradictory. Concerning withdrawal behaviours, research has focused primarily on the direct effects of job satisfaction and commitment, with results being, for the most part, weak to moderate (Hackett, 1989; Mayer and Schoorman, 1992; Terborg *et al.*, 1982).

Nevertheless, we will begin by outlining the direct effects of job satisfaction and commitment on withdrawal behaviours. We differentiate between two types of withdrawal behaviours, namely absenteeism and turnover intention. In the following, we will outline the effects for both withdrawal behaviours separately.

In several causal models, work attitudes are related to absence behaviour (for example, Hanisch and Hulin, 1991; Steers and Rhodes, 1978). As withdrawal behaviours, such as absenteeism and turnover, reflect invisible attitudes, such as job dissatisfaction and low organizational commitment, higher job satisfaction and

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organizational commitment imply lower absenteeism (Hanisch and Hulin, 1991). Prior research on this relationship has shown mixed results, varying from no effects at all to small effects of the work attitudes on absenteeism (Meyer, 1997; Sagie, 1998). Following the reasoning of the theoretical models, we assume:

*H1a.* Both job satisfaction and organizational commitment are negatively related to absenteeism.

Our aim however was to investigate this relationship more deeply. Sagie (1998) has suggested that the weak effects found so far are due to interaction effects of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Both job satisfaction and organizational commitment are thought to have negative effects on absenteeism. Still, the absenteeism of an already very satisfied employee will not decrease much due to increasing commitment. In contrast, the absenteeism of a less satisfied employee will decrease when commitment improves. Similarly, the absenteeism of a highly committed employee will not decrease due to increasing satisfaction to the same extent as will the absenteeism of a less committed employee. After all, job satisfaction and organizational commitment are two work attitudes that are strongly related, meaning that there is some overlap of the two work attitudes when it comes to effects on withdrawal behaviours. Thus, the hypothesis is as follows:

*H1b.* The relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism is moderated by commitment. For highly committed employees, the relationship will be lower than for employees with low levels of commitment.

Next, we turn to the relationship between job satisfaction, commitment and turnover intention. Turnover intention is defined as the intention to leave a job on a voluntary basis (Mobley, 1977). In a broader definition of the construct, it can be understood as the intention to voluntarily change companies or to leave the labour market altogether. We included turnover intention rather than actual turnover in our study for several reasons. First, we were interested in the present employees rather than those who had already left the organization. Second, actual turnover is influenced by the economic climate and by circumstances on the labour market (Carsten and Spector, 1987; Dipboye *et al.*, 1994). This means that the actual turnover would not give us a correct insight into the effects of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Consequently, we chose to employ turnover intention, keeping in mind that research results suggest that turnover intention does eventually lead to actual turnover (Mobley *et al.*, 1978; Steel and Ovalle, 1984).

To begin with, we will now outline the direct effects of job satisfaction and commitment on turnover intention. As mentioned above, invisible attitudes such as job dissatisfaction and low organizational commitment are reflected in withdrawal behaviours (Hanisch and Hulin, 1991). Consequently, higher organizational commitment and job satisfaction result in less turnover intention. This assertion is confirmed by prior research, which shows a negative relationship between job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intention (e.g. Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Mobley *et al.*, 1978; Williams and Hazer, 1986). Therefore, we assume:

*H2a.* Both job satisfaction and organizational commitment are negatively related to turnover intention.

Following the reasoning concerning the relationship between job satisfaction, commitment and absenteeism outlined above, we expect that the turnover intention of

an employee who is already highly satisfied or committed will not decrease due to increasing commitment or satisfaction to the same extent. We, therefore, assume:

- H2b.* The relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention is moderated by commitment. For highly committed employees the relationship will be lower than for employees with low levels of commitment.

## Methodology and results

### *Sample*

To test our hypotheses, data from two samples were collected. The companies involved in our research were selected based on existing contacts (convenience sampling). The first sample consisted of employees from a group of linked organizations in the electronics branch. The group consisted of one company with its three Dutch branch plants and one Slovakian branch plant. In order to examine if our results hold in a white-collar context, the second sample was comprised employees from the library and the ICT-service department of a Dutch university. Again, the access to these departments was based on existing contacts. Questionnaires were distributed among all the employees from these organizations. In order to be able to apply the questionnaires, we had to translate them. Three people conducted the translation from English into Dutch. Two people conducted the translation into Slovakian. This procedure was chosen to avoid translation errors.

In the first company, 67 employees returned the questionnaires completely or partially filled in (77 per cent of the questionnaires were returned). Twenty-nine of the participants were women, 33 were men (five respondents did not fill in their gender). The average age was 38 years (12 employees did not indicate their age). In the second company, 68 questionnaires were returned (48 per cent of the questionnaires were returned). The average age of the employees was 45 years. The sample consisted of 32 women and 36 men.

### *Instruments*

*Job satisfaction.* We used the short form of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire to assess job satisfaction. This short form consists of 20 items referring to different aspects of the job and work situation. The answer categories range from 1 = very unsatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. For this research, we collapsed the items into one scale, as job satisfaction is the total of the satisfaction reported for every aspect. Factor analyses extracting one factor were conducted. In the first sample, all items loaded on one factor. However, in the second sample, two items did not load strongly enough on the factor. In order to be able to compare the two studies, we decided to exclude these two items in both samples. The alphas for both samples are good ( $\alpha = 0.93$  for sample one and  $\alpha = 0.92$  for sample two).

*Organizational commitment.* This was measured using three dimensions, following Meyer *et al.*'s (1993) scales for the assessment of the affective, normative and continuance commitment. The answer categories range from 1 = totally agree to 7 = totally disagree. For the statistical analyses, the scores were recoded so that higher values represent a higher degree of commitment. In both samples, all items of the affective commitment scale and the normative commitment scale loaded high enough on one factor to include them in the scale. The respective alphas for affective and normative commitment are  $\alpha = 0.77$  and  $\alpha = 0.86$  in sample one;  $\alpha = 0.68$  and  $\alpha = 0.72$  for sample two. Factor analyses on the continuance commitment scale revealed two subscales: one referring to

the absence of alternatives and one referring to the accumulated costs of leaving the organization. This is in line with prior research (McGee and Ford, 1987). The reliability analysis of the “costs subscale” is good ( $\alpha = 0.76$  for sample one and  $\alpha = 0.72$  for sample two). However, in both samples, the reliability analyses of the “alternatives scale” disclosed dissatisfying results until only two items remained. Thus, we decided not to include the alternatives subscale in our study.

*Absenteeism.* This was measured using subjective self-report data. Sagie (1998) has shown in his research that the difference between subjective self-report data and objective absenteeism data is small. To assess absenteeism, we asked the respondents to indicate both the frequency and the total number of days they had been absent in the last 12 months. Although this question measures both absenteeism due to actual illness and voluntary absenteeism, total absenteeism is also an indicator of the attitudes of employees.

*Turnover intention.* This can be split into several stages: thinking about quitting, intention to search for another job and intention to quit. In total, there are five items used to measure the turnover intention. Answer categories range from 1 = totally agree to 5 = totally disagree. For the statistical analysis, the scores were recoded so that higher values represent a higher degree of turnover intention. In factor analyses in both samples, only one factor emerged. The alphas of both samples are good ( $\alpha = 0.94$  for sample one and  $\alpha = 0.88$  for sample two).

### *Analysis*

In order to control for effects of the different locations in the first sample, we used country as a control variable. In this variable, all other possible influences are included. Given the small sample size, it was not possible to do separate analyses for both countries and then compare the results. For the second dataset, we used organizational department and the type of function as control variables.

To test our hypotheses, we conducted hierarchical regression analyses. First, the control variables were entered into the regression analysis. In a second step, the independent variables were entered. In the last stage, the interaction terms were added. As both samples are small, we could not expect large effects. Consequently, a significance level of  $p < 0.10$  was chosen for the interpretation of the results. To avoid problems of multicollinearity, we performed separate regression analyses for every dimension of organizational commitment. Regression analyses on the duration of absenteeism revealed a violation of the prerequisites of regression analysis, indicating that the duration of absenteeism is not suitable for measuring illegal absenteeism. Therefore, we decided not to include the duration of absenteeism in the results.

## **Results**

### *Sample one*

For the results of the first sample, see Tables I-III. As evident in Table II, there were no significant effects of job satisfaction and organizational commitment on absenteeism. This contradicts *H1a*. Regarding *H1b*, positive interaction effects emerged with respect to affective commitment and the costs dimension of continuance commitment (see Table II). However, evident in Figures 1 and 2, job satisfaction had a negative effect on absenteeism with respect to low affective and low continuance commitment, whereas the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism was positive for high affective and high continuance commitment. Thus, *H1b* is partially confirmed.

**Table I.**  
Mean, standard deviation and correlations sample one

	Mean	SD	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Job satisfaction	4.63	1.23						
2. Affective commitment	3.88	1.41	0.70*					
3. Normative commitment	3.88	1.59	0.66*	0.74*				
4. Continuance commitment alternatives	3.84	1.64	-0.31**	-0.45*	-0.27**			
5. Continuance commitment costs	4.92	1.10	0.38*	0.50*	0.71*	0.17		
6. Turnover intention	2.33	1.19	-0.69*	-0.63*	-0.68*	0.26**	-0.50*	
7. Frequency absenteeism	0.79	1.68	-0.13	-0.31**	-0.06	0.23	-0.12	0.23

**Notes:** \* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$

**Table II.**  
Regression analysis job satisfaction and organizational commitment on absenteeism sample one

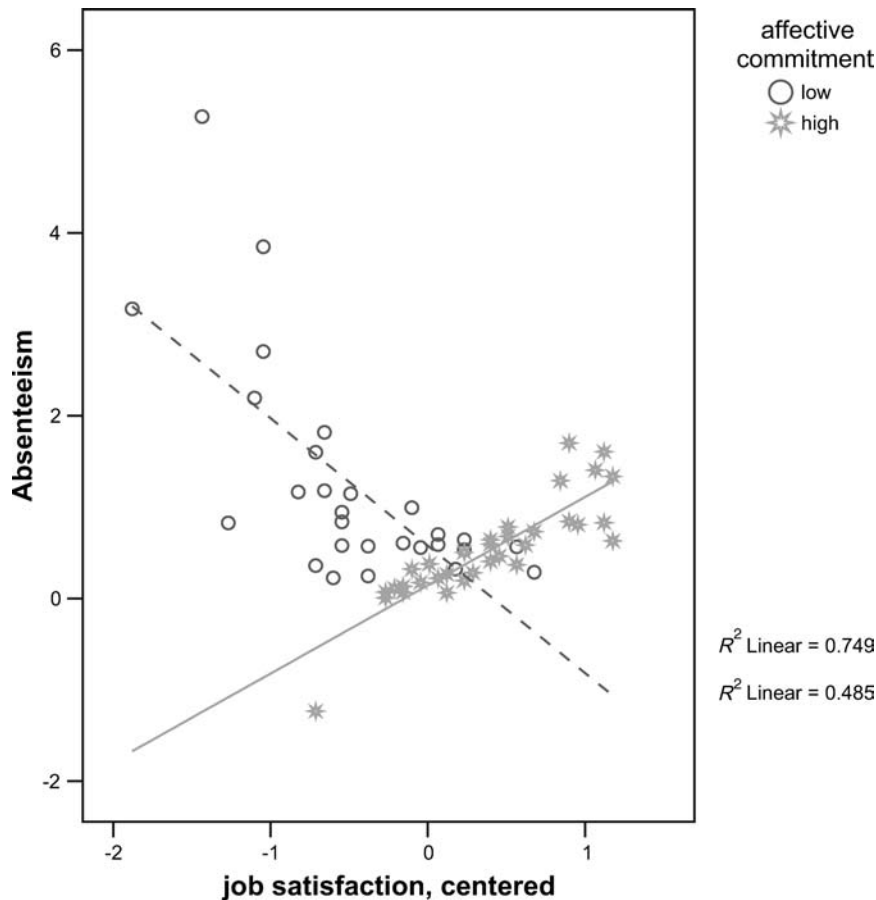
	Model 1		Model 2			Model 3		
	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
1. Country	0.17	0.03	0.10	0.10	0.07	0.07	0.29*	0.19*
Job satisfaction			0.11			0.08		
Affective commitment			-0.34**			-0.20		
Interaction						0.46*		
2. Country	0.16	0.02	0.13	0.03	0.01	0.13	0.07	0.03
Job satisfaction			-0.11			-0.08		
Normative commitment			0.02			0.02		
Interaction						0.19		
3. Country	0.18	0.03	0.19	0.06	0.02	0.16	0.14**	0.08***
Job satisfaction			-0.07			0.04		
Continuance commitment			-0.12			-0.20		
Interaction						0.31***		

**Notes:** \* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.05$ . Model 1 consists of the control variable(s), in model 2 independent variables are added for direct effects, in model 3 interaction effect is added

**Table III.**  
Regression analysis job satisfaction and organizational commitment on turnover intention sample one

	Model 1		Model 2			Model 3		
	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
1. Country	0.11	0.01	-0.04	0.52*	0.51*	0.05	0.53*	0.10
Job satisfaction			-0.43*			0.42*		
Affective commitment			-0.36*			0.33**		
Interaction						0.11		
2. Country	0.14	0.12	0.07	0.57*	0.55*	0.07	0.59*	0.03
Job satisfaction			-0.39*			-0.33*		
Normative commitment			-0.43*			-0.43*		
Interaction						0.17***		
3. Country	0.12	0.02	0.16	0.58*	0.57*	0.16***	0.60*	0.02
Job satisfaction			-0.52*			-0.45*		
Continuance commitment costs			-0.39*			-0.42*		
Interaction						0.15		

**Notes:** \* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.1$ . Model 1 consists of the control variable(s), in model 2 independent variables are added for direct effects, in model 3 interaction effect is added

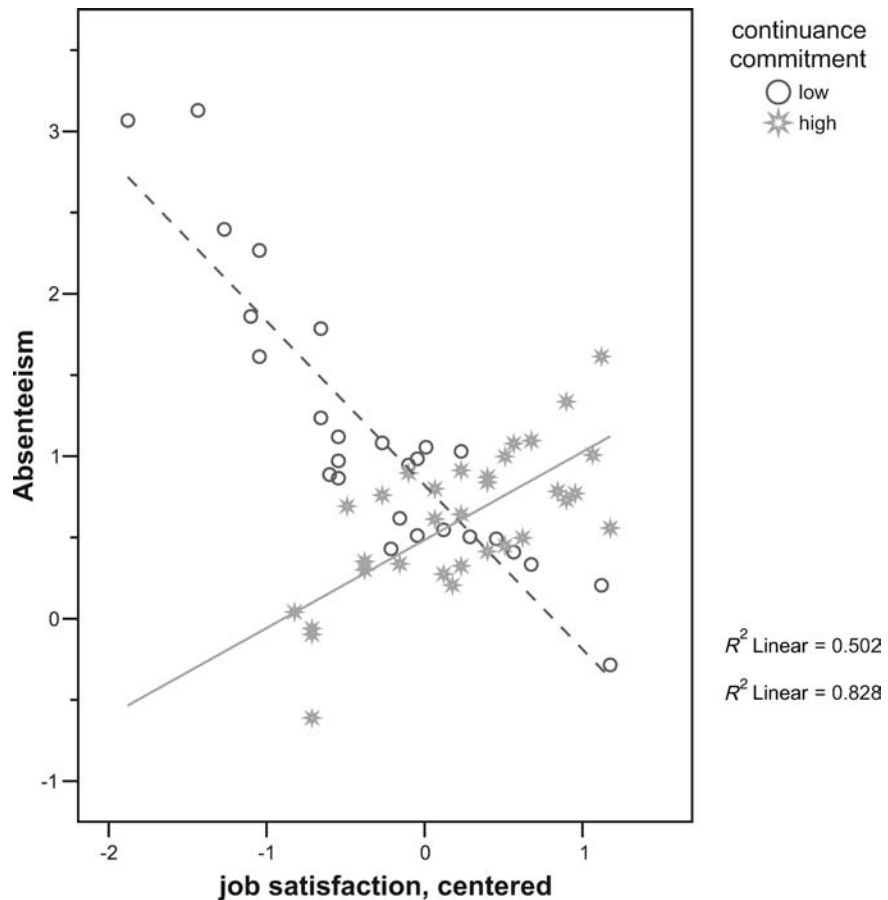


**Figure 1.**  
Effect of job satisfaction  
on absenteeism for low  
and high affective  
commitment

The results of the tests of *H2a* and *H2b* are presented in Table III. We found negative effects of both job satisfaction and organizational commitment on turnover intention, confirming *H2a*. The interaction effect between job satisfaction and normative commitment was the only significant effect with respect to turnover intention. This means *H2b* is partially confirmed (see Figure 3). However, the interaction effect found here is not as strong as the interaction effects on absenteeism ( $\beta = 0.17$  vs  $\beta = 0.46$  and  $\beta = 0.31$ ).

#### Sample two

The results for sample two are depicted in Tables IV-VI. In contrast to our expectations, we found no direct effects of job satisfaction and organizational commitment on absenteeism (Table V). We also found no interaction effects between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Consequently, both *H1a* and *H1b* were rejected. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment had a negative effect on turnover intention (Table VI). Thus, *H2a* is confirmed. However, we found no interaction effects between job satisfaction and organizational commitment on turnover intention. *H2b*, therefore, is rejected.

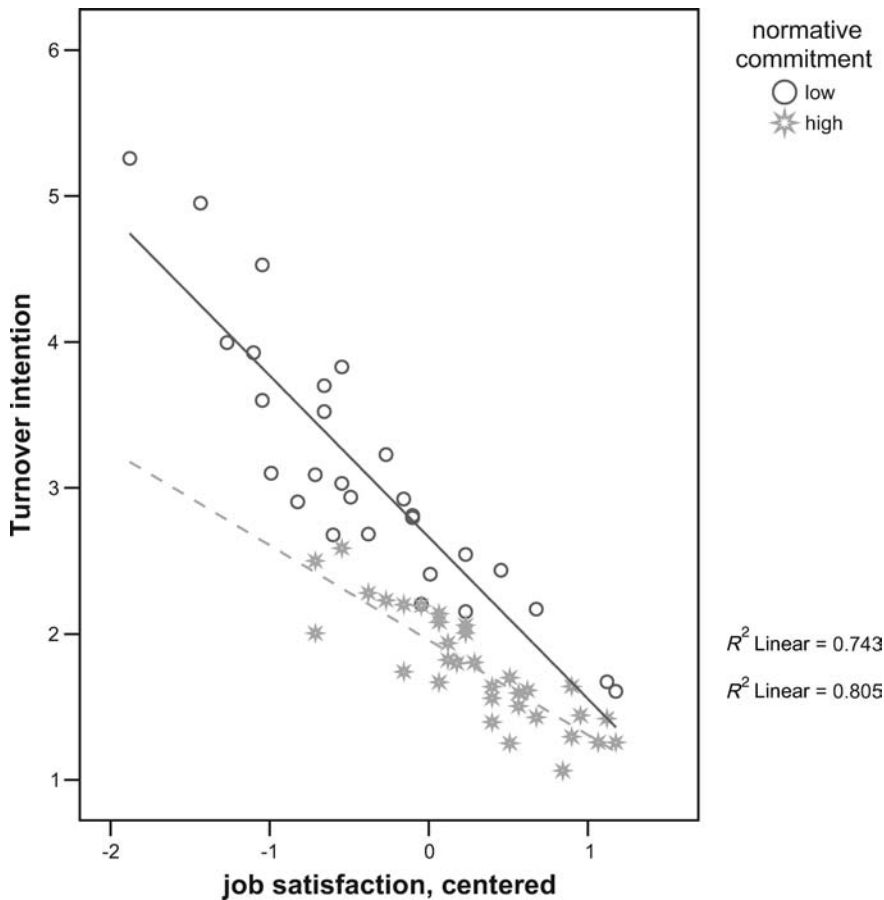


**Figure 2.**  
Effect of job satisfaction  
on absenteeism for low  
and high continuance  
commitment

### Discussion

From the results of the first study, we can conclude that the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention was moderated by normative commitment. Even in this small sample, the effect became significant. The moderator effect was positive. The relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention was indeed lower for high normative commitment than for low normative commitment, indicating an overlap of the two work attitudes in their effects on turnover intention. However, the fact that not every dimension of organizational commitment interacted significantly with job satisfaction does not mean that that dimension of commitment does not moderate the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention. We have to keep in mind that the samples in our studies were small. This means that research is required using larger samples before significant conclusions can be drawn.

We also found that the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism was moderated by affective commitment and continuance commitment. These moderator effects were also positive. However, the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism was negative for low (affective and continuance) commitment and positive for high (affective and continuance) commitment. This could be due to a



**Figure 3.**  
Effect of job satisfaction on turnover intention for low and high normative commitment

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Job satisfaction	3.79	0.63						
2. Affective commitment	4.77	0.96	0.52*					
3. Normative commitment	3.58	1.08	0.40*	0.50*				
4. Continuance commitment alternatives	4.32	1.71	-0.47*	-0.13	-0.18			
5. Continuance commitment costs	3.97	1.46	-0.07	0.13	0.32*	0.47*		
6. Turnover intention	2.30	1.08	-0.46*	-0.42*	-0.45*	0.08	-0.30**	
7. Frequency absenteeism	1.55	1.51	-0.13	-0.08	-0.18	0.03	-0.10	0.10

Notes: \* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$

**Table IV.**  
Mean, standard deviation and correlations sample two

group norm on illegal absenteeism in the organization. For example, if employees perceive that illegal absenteeism is accepted, it is possible that their job satisfaction and commitment will increase as a result (for a similar argument, see Sanders, 2004). This means that the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism could in

**Table V.**  
Regression analysis job satisfaction and organizational commitment on absenteeism sample two

		Model 1		Model 2			Model 3		
		$\beta$	$R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
1.	Type of function	0.18	0.04	0.15	0.07	0.03	0.15	0.07	0.00
	Organizational department	0.02		0.07			0.07		
	Job satisfaction			-0.22			-0.21		
	Affective commitment			0.16			0.17		
	Interaction						0.02		
2.	Type of function	0.18	0.04	0.14	0.07	0.03	0.12	0.07	0.00
	Organizational department	0.02		0.10			0.11		
	Job satisfaction			-0.08			-0.12		
	Normative commitment			-0.14			-0.12		
	Interaction						-0.06		
3.	Type of function	0.14	0.03	0.14	0.05	0.02	0.16	0.08	0.02
	Organizational department	0.06		0.08			0.11		
	Job satisfaction			-0.12			-0.13		
	Continuance commitment			-0.10			-0.04		
	Interaction						-0.17		

**Notes:** \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . Model 1 consists of the control variable(s), in model 2 independent variables are added for direct effects, in model 3 interaction effect is added

**Table VI.**  
Regression analysis job satisfaction and organizational commitment on turnover intention sample two

		Model 1		Model 2			Model 3		
		$\beta$	$R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
1.	Type of function	0.00	0.00	-0.10	0.27*	0.27*	-0.13	0.29*	0.02
	Organizational department	0.05		0.22**			0.21		
	Job satisfaction			-0.43*			-0.45*		
	Affective commitment			-0.17			-0.23**		
	Interaction						-0.17		
2.	Type of function	0.00	0.00	-0.14	0.34*	0.34*	-0.15	0.35*	0.00
	Organizational department	0.05		0.33**			0.34*		
	Job satisfaction			-0.41*			-0.44*		
	Normative commitment			-0.35*			-0.33*		
	Interaction						-0.08		
3.	Type of function	-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.33*	0.33*	0.00	0.33*	0.00
	Organizational department	0.05		0.17			0.17		
	Job satisfaction			-0.52*			-0.52*		
	Continuance commitment			-0.31*			-0.23*		
	Interaction						-0.03		

**Notes:** \* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.05$ . Model 1 consists of the control variable(s), in model 2 variables are added for direct effects, in model 3 interaction effect is added

fact be in the opposite direction for highly committed employees. Another explanation concerns the feelings of contribution that highly satisfied and committed employees may have. These feelings may result in these employees believing that it is all right for them to be absent, as they already give so much to the organization.

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Highly satisfied and committed employees may actually increase their (illegal) absenteeism.

A third finding was that the moderator effects in sample one were not replicated in the second sample. The difference in results could be due to the specific organizational settings of the samples. Sample one, where most moderator effects were confirmed, consisted mainly of blue-collar workers who worked in the assembly process. The respondents of sample two were predominantly more highly educated employees of the library and ICT-service department of a Dutch university. We therefore suspect that the educational and/or job level of the employees influenced the results of the regression analyses. More specifically, we assume that employees who have higher education or work on a higher job level are better able to differentiate between their work attitudes. The overlap between the work attitudes is more prominent for employees with a lower educational attainment and/or a lower level in the hierarchy of jobs.

Our fourth finding showed no evidence of direct effects of the work attitudes on absenteeism. This is in line with prior research. According to Sagie (1998), this lack of results is due to the presence of moderator effects. We did indeed find evidence of these moderator effects in the first sample. However, in the second sample, regression analyses revealed no moderator effects. The lack of direct effects can also be due to the way we measured absenteeism, namely by using self-report data. Absenteeism is a sensitive subject for employees. Because of this, employees may refuse to give correct information on absenteeism or give socially desirable answers, resulting in incomplete and incorrect data on absenteeism. Moreover, we used total frequency as an indicator of illegal absenteeism. It seems to be a valid way to assess illegal absenteeism. Nevertheless, frequent absenteeism could also be due to other factors in the organization, such as stress. Not total frequency of absenteeism but frequent short-term absenteeism seems to be the most valid way to measure illegal absenteeism (Sanders and Nauta, 2004).

## Conclusion

We conclude from our results that the relationship between job satisfaction, organizational commitment and withdrawal behaviours is very complex. This has implications not only for future research, but also for managing organizations. With respect to HRM policy aimed at enhancing work attitudes, managers of organizations should keep in mind that the effect of such policy on withdrawal behaviours is highly complex. Our results suggest that the effects on withdrawal behaviours are in part dependent on the presence of other work attitudes. Therefore, focusing on one attitude rather than on a combined pattern of attitudes may not lead to the goals aspired to by the organization.

## *Limitations and recommendations*

This research has several limitations. First is the fact that we used small samples. This means that we cannot expect many significant results to emerge. Small samples also limit the power of the outcomes of the regression analyses and, therefore, the generalizability of our results. A second limitation is rooted in the method we used to measure absenteeism. We used the total frequency of absenteeism based on self-report data. As mentioned above, frequent short-term absenteeism is a more valid way to assess illegal absenteeism (Sanders and Nauta, 2004). Third, the factor analysis on the continuance commitment scale (Meyer *et al.*, 1993) revealed that this scale comprised two separate dimensions. Reliability on the alternatives-scale revealed that one item did not fit into the scale, resulting in only two items remaining for the analyses. Fourth,

although we had participants from two countries, the sample sizes were too small for a systematic comparison. In our analyses, we found that for the first sample, country was a significant control variable in the preliminary analyses. However, in the regression analyses, country did not turn out to be a significant predictor. As our sample sizes were so small, we did not speculate prior to our analyses how the countries may differ.

Nevertheless, our result may indicate an interesting starting point for speculation. Hofstede (2001; cf. 1994) does not report cultural values for Slovakia, but on the basis of older data from the Czech Republic, we can assume that the biggest difference between the Netherlands and Slovakia is to be found in the dimension masculinity/femininity. As this dimension refers to values that are important in the workplace, for example, achievement vs friendly atmosphere (Hofstede, 2001, p. 281), we can assume that this difference influences the relationship between attitudes and withdrawal behaviour. Consequently, future research might profitably examine how different cultural values impact on the relationship between attitudes and withdrawal behaviour.

We find that both the results and the limitations of our research should stimulate future research. To begin with, future research should aim at unravelling more of the complex relationship between the work attitudes and withdrawal behaviours. This step requires more attention to possible moderator effects. In our view, much will be gained from research of this type. Secondly, concerning the results of the moderator effects on absenteeism, additional research should examine the effect of group norms on absenteeism. Sanders and Hoekstra (1999) have already shown that group norms have an effect on short-term frequent absenteeism. A third question for future studies concerns the direction of the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism. Research into the direction of this relationship will lead to deeper insight concerning the moderator effects we found. A fourth point motivating future research should be the need to use larger samples.

The use of larger samples will offer more insight into the relationships we investigated and will improve the generalizability of the results. A fifth point concerns the assessment of illegal absenteeism using the method recommended by Sanders and Nauta (2004), namely to measure illegal absenteeism by assessing frequent short-term absenteeism. The results from our research already revealed that frequency is a more appropriate assessment of voluntary absence than the duration of absenteeism. We expect better results when illegal absenteeism is assessed by frequent short-term absence.

In conclusion, we recommend more research be undertaken on the dimensions of organizational commitment. Factor analysis has shown that the continuance commitment scale actually comprises two dimensions. This outcome corresponds with other research (for example, McGee and Ford, 1987; Hackett *et al.*, 1994; cf. Meyer, 1997). It is possible that these two dimensions have different effects on outcome variables, which need to be explored further.

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