A STRUCTURAL MODEL OF TEACHER ROLE STRESS, SATISFACTION, COMMITMENT, AND INTENTIONS TO LEAVE: A COMMENT ON CONLEY AND YOU (2009)\(^1\)

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Summary.—Conley and You assessed the plausibility of three alternative model specifications of the relations between role stressors (i.e., role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload) and organizational commitment, satisfaction, and turnover intentions among a sample of 178 teachers employed in four Southern California high schools. Using structural equations modeling procedures to evaluate their data, the authors reported the best fit for their “fully mediated effects” model wherein there was a “strong causal path from role ambiguity and role conflict → satisfaction → commitment → intentions to leave” (p. 781). This note addresses methodological issues with the present study and provides suggestions for follow-up efforts designed to replicate and/or extend this line of research.

The organizational behavior literature is replete with studies that have examined linkages similar to those explored in Conley and You’s study. In fact, Smith, Davy, and Everly (1995, p. 131) summarize prior research which examined the causal ordering of relations between satisfaction, commitment, and turnover. However, few studies have employed latent variable structural equation modeling (LVSE), a method noted for its ability to test structural parameters while accounting for random and systematic errors (Williams & Podsakoff, 1989). Conley and You (2009) did use LVSE modeling to test their hypothesized linkages. However, as noted on pp. 776 and 784, they used a single indicator to measure turnover intentions. Utilization of multiple indicators to measure turnover intentions, typical in this line of research (e.g., see Fogarty, Singh, Rhoads, & Moore, 2000), would control for measurement error and allow confirmatory factor analysis of the complete measurement model. This analysis would test the construct distinctiveness of all six of the study measures, as opposed to just that of the three role stressors. For, as noted by Andersen and Gerbing (1988), assessment of the full measurement model is the critical first step prior to testing structural linkages.

Future efforts in the educational arena might also consider expansion of the hypothesized model to include other viable mediating constructs. As Conley and You note on p. 773, burnout represents a viable mediating mechanism, as does stress arousal (e.g., see Smith, Davy, & Everly, 2007).

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To the extent that unexplained variance in the model is due to correlated omitted variables (i.e., nonrandom influences), the consequence of these omissions is biased estimates of the structural parameters relating the role stressors, the mediating constructs, and turnover intentions. In addition, the observed effects of role conflict and role ambiguity have been reported to depend on common antecedent variables (Schaubroeck, Cotton, & Jennings, 1989). The current study does not include possible role stress antecedents. Identification and measurement of additional influences on both roles stressors and their consequences may add to the refinement of the present model and thus should be investigated.

The authors fairly note a number of the study’s limitations, including the limited nonrepresentative sample size, use of cross-sectional data, and the aforementioned use of a single indicator to measure turnover intentions. In addition, the authors tested an *a priori* sequence of models as illustrated on p. 780. Their explanation for testing each of the alternative model specifications was “to determine the best fitting model” (p. 779). However, the theoretical basis of each model could be more clearly elaborated. For example, it is unclear why there is no path between satisfaction and commitment in Model 1 given the strong theoretical and empirical support for this path, though the authors did indeed examine this path in Model 2 and Model 3. Moreover, an equally valid approach for demonstrating the superiority of Model 3 would be to simply test a single, fully saturated model grounded in theory and prior research, followed by a series of nested model comparisons. This approach would obviate the need for a series of alternative model specifications, and address the concern with Model 1 noted above. Nonetheless, both approaches should yield the same final results, thus making this issue a matter of personal preference.

Incorporation of significantly larger representative samples in future investigations would address other methodological concerns with the present effort. Obviously, there would be a positive effect on the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, in addition to facilitating the incorporation of additional constructs into the model, it would allow the use of more comprehensive measures of specific constructs. For example, this study utilized four- and three-item measures for role ambiguity and role conflict, respectively, out of the 14 items that comprised the original scale (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). While it is desirable to utilize short, reliable, and valid indicators for each construct when available, the authors need to adequately justify how they arrived at the shortened set of items that they selected. Conley and You’s articulated rationale on p. 776 for the selected items from each scale would be more compelling if they had cited prior research which demonstrated the psychometric properties of the shortened versions of these measures (e.g., see Fogarty, *et al.*, 2000, p. 41).
The above concerns notwithstanding, the authors should be applauded for their efforts to gain a better understanding of the antecedents to teacher decisions to leave their employers, for the costs of unintended turnover in terms of retraining, relocation, and educational disruption to the school, teacher, and students, respectively, can be significant. In an era of declining resources for public education, research efforts that may ultimately lead to strategies that reduce unintended turnover should be strongly encouraged.

REFERENCES


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