

## Propensity to Leave: A Preliminary Examination of March and Simon's Model

## La tendance à laisser un emploi : examen préliminaire du modèle de March et Simon

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Résumé de l'article

Parmi les diverses attitudes des employés au travail, bien peu ont reçu moins d'attention que celle de quitter leur emploi (Price, 1977). March et Simon (1958) soutiennent que la décision de rester au service d'une organisation ou de la quitter dépend de la balance des avantages qui sont offerts à l'employé par l'organisation et des bénéfices qu'il lui apporte. Quand le poids des avantages par rapport aux bénéfices s'accroît, la propension de l'individu à quitter l'organisation diminue. La balance présente comme une fonction de deux mécanismes distincts: la désirabilité éprouvée de quitter l'organisation et la facilité d'abandon de l'organisation.

La satisfaction au travail et les possibilités perceptibles de déplacement à l'intérieur de l'organisation sont identifiées comme les déterminants premiers de la désirabilité qui est ressentie de quitter l'organisation. D'autre part, la facilité d'abandon de l'organisation que l'on perçoit reflète une évaluation des avantages disponibles ailleurs ou des avantages escomptés de garder l'emploi actuel. Le nombre des possibilités extérieures perceptibles par l'individu est le premier facteur identifié comme déterminant de la facilité de départ. Ceci dépend en retour du nombre d'organisations qui s'offrent à l'individu et qui embauchent des gens de qualifications équivalentes, du niveau de l'activité économique (chômage) et des caractéristiques personnelles des participants qui reflètent leur possibilité d'emploi sur le marché du travail ou par d'autres organisations (sexe, âge, statut social, stabilité).

March et Simon notent aussi que les deux principales composantes du modèle ne sont pas indépendantes. Ainsi, si un individu n'est pas satisfait de son emploi (et que, en conséquence, son désir de changement est élevé) mais qu'il se rend compte en même temps qu'il est difficile de changer d'emploi, la probabilité de départ sera faible. De même, si l'individu perçoit qu'il est facile de changer d'emploi, mais qu'il est satisfait du sien, la probabilité de départ sera également faible. En conséquence, la décision de quitter une organisation est plus susceptible de se produire, lorsque l'individu perçoit à la fois une grande facilité de départ et une forte désirabilité de changement.

La présente étude fut mise au point dans une tentative préalable afin d'appliquer dans le concret le modèle de March et Simon (1958). Les questionnaires furent distribués au hasard à un échantillon d'employés professionnels, cadres et techniques dans vingt-trois départements d'État. 759 ont retourné les questionnaires (une proportion de 69 pour cent). Une seule question, qui demandait aux répondants s'il était probable qu'ils quitteraient volontairement l'organisation au cours de l'année suivante, fut utilisée comme mesure de la propension au départ, c'est-à-dire la variable dépendante. Des questions appropriées furent utilisées pour établir la satisfaction au travail, la possibilité qu'ils percevaient d'être mutés à l'intérieur de l'organisation, la facilité de mouvement qu'ils ressentait, les possibilités d'emploi à l'extérieur, le chômage, l'état des affaires, les caractéristiques personnelles et l'interaction d'une forte facilité de déplacement ressentie en même temps que la satisfaction au travail.

Les résultats de l'analyse corrélatrice confirment en grande partie le modèle en regard des déterminants de la facilité de déplacement perçue (tableau I). Le nombre des ouvertures à l'extérieur de l'organisation était reliée positivement à la facilité de déplacement que l'on percevait. De même, plus le taux de chômage était élevé, moins l'individu percevait la facilité de déplacement. Les particularités individuelles, reflétant la perception que la personne avait de la situation du marché du travail, étaient également significatives, bien que leur rapport variait selon l'échantillon.

Le tableau II présente les résultats de la vérification du modèle en utilisant la propension au départ comme variable dépendante. La satisfaction au travail était associée d'une façon significative à la tendance de l'individu à vouloir quitter son emploi pour les trois groupes professionnels. Plus la personne était satisfaite de son travail, moins elle songeait à quitter l'organisation. En outre, plus les possibilités de mutation étaient grandes à l'intérieur de l'organisation, moins était marquée la possibilité de départ pour les cadres et les techniciens. Cependant, la facilité de déplacement perçue n'était qu'en corrélation significative avec la variable dépendante pour les occupations professionnelles. Enfin, une forte facilité de déplacement et le manque de satisfaction au travail étaient associés par interaction d'une façon significative à la volonté de quitter un emploi.

En dépit du fait que la plupart des variables étaient en corrélation d'une façon significative avec la propension à quitter l'emploi, tel qu'énoncé par March et Simon (1958), entre 13 et 19 pour cent seulement de la variation dans la variable dépendante trouvaient explication dans les trois échantillons examinés au cours de cette recherche. Sans conteste, un plus grand nombre de variables influencent la décision d'abandonner un emploi où des spécifications supplémentaires de ces variables sont nécessaires.

# Propensity to Leave

## A Preliminary Examination of March and Simon's Model

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*March and Simon's (1958) model of the decision to participate was examined empirically with a sample of professional, managerial and technical employees. The results provide partial support for the model. While confirming the importance of job satisfaction in predicting the propensity to leave, perceived ease of movement, intraorganizational movement possibilities, and the interaction of job dissatisfaction and ease of movement were also found to be significant independent contributors in explaining the employee's propensity to leave.*

Few employee behaviors have received as much attention as the decision to leave the organisation (Price, 1977). The potential consequences for both the individual and the organization have stimulated an extensive search for the important determinants of turnover. Psychologists have generally reported a consistent negative relationship between dimensions of job satisfaction and turnover. Moreover, individuals with certain characteristics, such as those who are younger, female, less tenured, etc., appear to be more likely to leave their organizations than others (Brayfield and Crockett, 1955; Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson and Capwell, 1957; Porter and Steers, 1973; Schuh, 1967; Vroom, 1964). At a more aggregate level of analysis, economists have discovered that turnover rates vary with the state of the economy (Armknrecht and Early, 1972; Block, 1978; Stoicov and Raimon, 1968). Unfortunately, few attempts have been made to examine simultaneously the impact of both economic and psychological determinants of employee turnover.

While research has demonstrated the impact of several independent variables on the decision to leave, there has been little theoretical development of models of the turnover decision. Porter and Steers (1973) challenge

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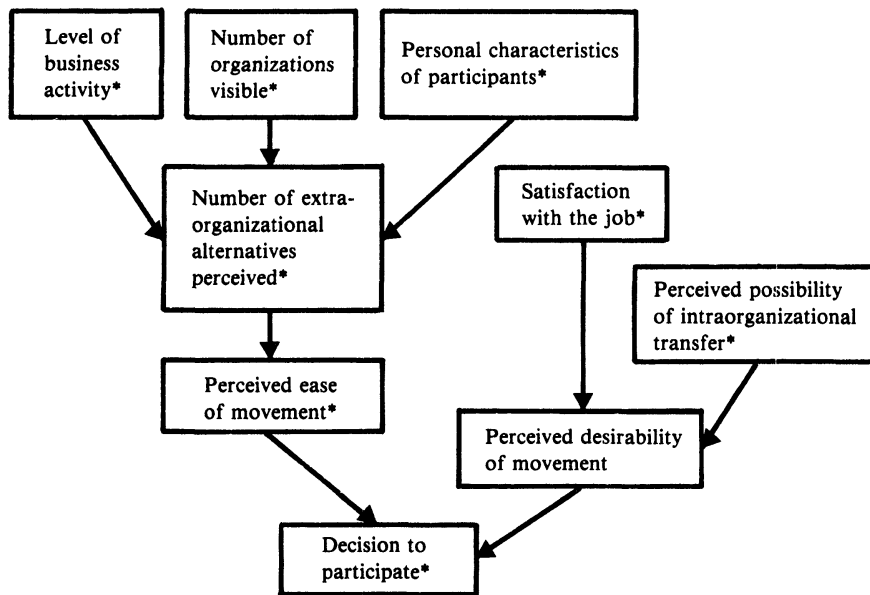
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researchers to examine more carefully the withdrawal process and especially the role of met and unmet expectations. Mobley (1977), responding to them, develops a model of the intermediate linkages between job satisfaction or dissatisfaction and employee turnover. However, only the latter of the above models has been subjected to empirical test (Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth, 1978). Another model, that of March and Simon (1958) which combines economic and psychological variables, despite frequent reference has received little empirical attention (for an exception, see Schwab and Dyer, 1976).

March and Simon (1958) argue that the decision to stay or leave an organization is dependent on the balance of inducements offered by organization to the employee and contributions of the employee to the organization. As the balance of inducements over contributions increases, the propensity of the individual participant to leave the organization decreases. The balance is presented as a function of two distinct mechanisms: the perceived desirability of leaving the organization and the perceived ease of movement from the organization. The major components of the model are presented in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

March and Simon's Model of the Decision to Participate



Note: Variables tested in this study are indicated by an asterisk.

Where an individual employee believes that contributions made to the organization exceed the inducements provided by the organization, the perceived desirability of movement is likely to be high. March and Simon (1958) indicate that both job satisfaction and the perceived possibilities of intraorganizational transfer impact the perceived desirability of movement. While these two variables are identified, the individual's satisfaction with the job is viewed as the primary factor. Dissatisfaction with various aspects of the job is likely to increase the perceived desirability of leaving the organization. The model goes on to specify three determinants of job satisfaction; conformity of the job to the individual's self image, predictability of the job, and compatibility of the job with other roles. However, as the nature and causes of job satisfaction have been discussed extensively elsewhere (Locke, 1976), they are not discussed here. Where the individual is strongly dissatisfied with his or her job, two alternatives exist: (1) to leave the organization or (2) to change jobs within the organization. For this reason, March and Simon (1958) suggest that as the perceived possibilities for transfer within the organization increase, the perceived desirability of leaving the organization decreases.

Whereas the perceived desirability of movement reflects the affective response of the individual to his or her job and the inducements-contribution balance, the second major component of the model, the perceived ease of movement from the organization, reflects an assessment of the inducements available elsewhere of foregone by remaining in the present job. March and Simon (1958) state that "(u)nder nearly all conditions the most accurate single predictor of labor turnover is the state of the economy" (p. 100). That is, when a lot of jobs are available, movement between firms is high and when jobs are scarce, movement is low. Thus, the perceived ease of movement for an individual is dependent on the availability of jobs for which he or she is qualified, in organizations which are visible to the individual.

The primary factor identified as a determinant of the perceived ease of movement is the number of extraorganizational alternatives perceived by the individual. This in turn depends on both visibility and job availability factors. The greater the number of organizations which are visible to the individual and which hire people with equivalent qualifications, the more extraorganizational alternatives which are likely to be perceived. The number of jobs available is strongly related to the prevailing level of business activity. March and Simon (1958) distinguish between two types of measures of business activity. The first is the level of unemployment. As unemployment increases, the number of jobs available decreases. The authors also note that when organizations expand, there is not likely to be any employees

fired, but when they contract, there is unlikely to be any hiring. Therefore, the impact of business activity in the economy on the expansion or contraction of a given organization is also relevant. When the organization in which the individual is employed is contracting, search may be stimulated, increasing the number of organizations visible to the participant as viable alternatives.

The final set of variables hypothesized to affect the number of extraorganizational alternatives perceived is personal characteristics of the participants. Individual attributes reflect the employability of the person in the labor market, his or her visibility to other organizations, and their willingness to leave the organization. Four individual characteristics are identified as important: (1) *sex* — males are likely to perceive it easier to change jobs and may, because of labor market discrimination be more visible to other organizations than females; (2) *age* — older people are likely to have less perceived ease of movement. When organizations rank job applicants, age becomes a negatively valued characteristic when skill and other attributes are held constant. This can occur because of higher costs of hiring older employees (i.e., wages, health care, vacations, etc.) compared to their expected length of service. Thus, older individuals will perceive fewer extraorganizational alternatives; (3) *social status* — individuals with lower social status are likely to perceive movement to be more difficult and fewer job alternatives to be available. Again, as with sex, this may be due in part to discrimination within the labor market; and (4) *length of service* — the longer an individual has been employed by a given organization, the more his or her skills become specific to that organization. This increase in specialization makes the individual more indispensable to the firm and less attractive to other organizations. Therefore, greater tenure will decrease the number of extraorganizational alternatives perceived. On the other hand, increased levels of generalized training or education should increase the number of alternatives perceived.

Beyond these three sets of determinants (i.e., business activity, organizations visible, personal characteristics) of the number of perceived alternatives, March and Simon (1958) also specify the characteristics of organizations which make them visible to individuals (e.g., size, distinguishable product, prestige, growth, number of high status occupations). Moreover, other variables which increase the total number of individuals visible to the organization are also discussed. However, these variables are not discussed in depth here as they are less relevant to the model as tested.

March and Simon (1958) also note that the two major components of the model are not independent. That is, if an individual is dissatisfied with

his or her job (and thus perceived desirability of movement is high) but perceives that it is difficult to change jobs, the probability of leaving will be low. Similarly, if an individual perceives that it is easy to move but is satisfied with his or her job, the probability of leaving will also be low. Therefore, the decision to leave the organization is most likely to occur when the individual perceives high ease of movement *and* high desirability of movement.

The present study was designed as a preliminary attempt to operationalize the March and Simon (1958) model. Unfortunately, actual turnover data were unavailable, and therefore, an employee's propensity to leave the organization is used as the dependent variable. While the propensity to leave has been found to be more strongly related to turnover than job attitudes (Atchison and Lefferts, 1972; Kraut, 1975, Mobley *et.al.*, 1978; Nicholson, Wall, and Lischeron, 1977), it cannot be considered a substitute for actual turnover data.

## **METHOD**

### **Subjects**

A stratified random sample was drawn from the professional, managerial, and technical employees in 23 departments of a state government. All women and minority employees were included in the study, along with a fifteen percent random sample of all non-minority employees. As part of a larger study, 759 respondents returned questionnaires (a 69% response rate). Employees were included in three occupational groups (professional, managerial, technical) on the basis of the employer's job classification plan. For the purposes of the study, the three occupational groups are considered separate samples. The three samples were examined separately because past research has found significant differences in the results due to differences in the nature of the subjects. Subsample analysis was selected rather than using occupational dummy variables in order to determine whether the March and Simon (1958) model would generalize across samples. Mean age of the respondents was 40.8 years, 28 percent were female, 79 percent had at least one college degree, and the mean tenure with the state government was 10.1 years.

### **Procedure**

Questionnaires were distributed to the sample through the internal mail system of the state government. Letters from the researchers and a state of-

ficial encouraging participation accompanied the questionnaire. The respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Stamped return envelopes were provided to allow respondents to mail questionnaires directly to the researchers.

### Measures

*Dependent variable.* The propensity to leave was measured by a single item asking respondents, "What is the probability that you will voluntarily leave this employer within the next year?" Response categories were ten percent intervals measuring the chance of leaving.

*Independent variables.* Job satisfaction was assessed by a single item overall satisfaction measure, "Overall, how satisfied are you with your job in this department?" A five point scale ranging from very dissatisfied to very satisfied was used. For exploratory work of this nature, it was felt that an overall measure of job satisfaction was acceptable as items such as these have been found to be strongly related to job facet measures of job satisfaction (Wanous and Lawler, 1972).

Perceived opportunity for intraorganizational mobility was measured by asking respondents to list each of the jobs they expected to hold in the organization in the future. A count of the total number of promotions expected was used as the independent variable. This measure clearly reflects a realistic assessment of the individual's expectations for movement within the organization.

Desirability of movement was not directly measured. A single item measure of ease of movement was developed for the study. "How easy would it be for you to get a job in another organization if you wanted one in the near future?" Responses, on a five point scale, ranged from very easy to very hard.

Perceived extraorganizational alternatives and number of organizations visible were collapsed into a single measure, "How many other organizations in this geographic area employ individuals with your skills and experience?" ranging from very few to very many (on a five point scale). March and Simon (1958) note that perceived extraorganizational alternatives for most occupations are limited by geography and therefore, individuals were only asked to respond about opportunities in their geographic area.

In order to test the distinction of March and Simon (1958), two separate dimensions of business activity were assessed. "How high is the unemployment level in your occupation compared to others?" was used to

measure perceived unemployment on a five point scale ranging from much lower to much higher. To investigate business activity at the firm level, as the sample used included 23 government departments, three items were developed to measure governmental activity in that department. The items were related to the certainty of the departmental budget, the degree of change in that budget, and the degree of change in the number of programs and services offered by the department. The extent to which these conditions were prevalent in each department was measured using five point scales with appropriate anchors. The three items were combined into an index; where uncertainty, decreasing budgets, and decreases in programs and services would indicate a contraction in governmental activity.

To examine the interaction of high perceived ease of movement and job dissatisfaction, a dummy variable was created where a respondent perceived both high ease and high dissatisfaction. High perceived ease of movement was operationalized as a rating of very easy (1) or easy (2) on the five point scale and high dissatisfaction as a rating of very dissatisfied (1) or dissatisfied (2) on a five point scale. Finally, data on the individual's age, sex, education, and tenure were included in the questionnaire.

## RESULTS

The means, standard deviations, zero order correlations, and standardized regression coefficients of the aspects of the March and Simon (1958) model are presented in Tables 1 and 2. An examination of the overall correlation matrices for the three samples reveals that generally the pattern of relationships among variables are similar across samples and therefore, are not presented here (but are available from the authors upon request). For purposes of presentation and discussion, the results on the determinants of the perceived ease of movement are presented first, followed by the test of the overall March and Simon (1958) model.

### Perceived Ease of Movement

March and Simon (1958) argue that the primary influence on the perceived ease of movement are the perceived alternatives available. The number of perceived extraorganizational alternatives is in turn a function of availability of jobs in the labor market and the visibility of the individual. The correlational results are strongly supportive of the model for all three samples (see Table 1). The greater the number of perceived alternatives, the greater the perceived ease of movement from the organization. The correlation was significant for all three occupational groups, although the



magnitude was much lower for the technical sample. An examination of the mean data reveals that while all groups saw a moderate number of alternative jobs available, the technical sample on average perceived it to be much more difficult to find another job (see Table 2). This difference helps to explain the lower correlation in the technical sample. However, when entered into a multiple regression analysis, the number of perceived extraorganizational alternatives makes a significant independent contribution to explaining the perceived ease of movement for all three samples.

Job availability is also assessed by measures reflecting the state of the economy. For all three occupational groups, the perceived level of unemployment is negatively related to the individual's perceived ease of movement from the organization. The higher the level of unemployment, the less chance of finding another job. While the economy wide measure of business activity was significant, the organization specific variable was not found to be significant in any of the samples. The expansion or decline in government departmental budgets and programs appears to have no impact on the individual's perceived ease of obtaining alternative employment. Perceived unemployment remained significant across occupations when included in a regression equation with other determinants of the perceived ease of movement.

Individual attributes are also presented in the model as reflecting the person's visibility in the labor market. March and Simon (1958) propose that younger individuals, males, more educated people, and individuals with less tenure and therefore, less organization specific skills, are likely to be more visible to other organizations with jobs available. Hence, individuals with these characteristics should report greater perceived ease of movement from the firm. The relationship between personal attributes and the dependent variable vary across samples. For the professional sample, older respondents, with less education and with longer tenure with the state government perceive significantly less opportunity to move. Only sex was not significantly correlated with the dependent variable. However, only education remained significant in the regression analysis. Age and tenure may have become insignificant as a result of their colinearity. Only age and tenure were significantly related to ease of movement in the managerial sample. Moreover, only tenure remains significant in the regression analysis. Finally, age and sex are significantly associated with perceived ease of movement in the technical sample. Sex (females perceive less ease of movement) may be significant for this sample in part because of the low proportion of women in the professional (5%) and managerial (18%) occupations as compared to the technical sample (38%). However, only age maintains its positive significant contribution in the regression equation.

**TABLE 1**  
**Regression of Ease of Movement on Independent Variables**

| <i>Independent Variables</i>   | <i>Professional (n = 103)</i> |          |          |                          | <i>Managerial (n = 234)</i> |          |          |                           | <i>Technical (n = 389)</i> |          |          |                           |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|----------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|----------|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------|----------|---------------------------|
|                                | $\bar{X}$                     | $\sigma$ | <i>r</i> | $\beta$                  | $\bar{X}$                   | $\sigma$ | <i>r</i> | $\beta$                   | $\bar{X}$                  | $\sigma$ | <i>R</i> | $\beta$                   |
| Perceive unemployment          | 1.99                          | 1.08     | .27**    | .34**                    | 2.31                        | 1.11     | .20**    | .25**                     | 2.26                       | 1.19     | .31**    | .31**                     |
| Business activity level        | 11.10                         | 2.09     | -.11     | .04                      | 10.55                       | 2.81     | -.05     | .02                       | 10.16                      | 2.59     | -.14**   | -.08                      |
| Perceived alternatives         | 2.94                          | 1.38     | -.26**   | -.22**                   | 3.07                        | 1.45     | -.29**   | -.28**                    | 2.86                       | 1.36     | -.13**   | -.13**                    |
| Age                            | 46.93                         | 8.71     | .43**    | .16                      | 42.38                       | 10.79    | .17**    | .02                       | 38.28                      | 11.20    | .09*     | .15**                     |
| Sex (female + 2)               | 1.05                          | .22      | -.13     | -.10                     | 1.18                        | .38      | -.08     | -.06                      | 1.38                       | 0.49     | .13**    | .09                       |
| Education                      | 5.05                          | .88      | -.34**   | -.33**                   | 4.96                        | .85      | .00      | .08                       | 4.92                       | 0.86     | -.02     | -.09                      |
| Tenure                         | 15.83                         | 9.58     | .41**    | .19                      | 12.52                       | 8.94     | .21**    | .19**                     | 7.04                       | 6.10     | .04      | -.03                      |
| R <sup>2</sup> ( $\bar{R}^2$ ) |                               |          |          |                          |                             |          |          |                           |                            |          |          |                           |
| F value (degrees of freedom)   |                               |          |          | .42(.37)<br>9.27**(7.90) |                             |          |          | .19(.16)<br>6.81**(7,203) |                            |          |          | .15(.13)<br>9.15**(7,359) |

Note: Perceive ease of movement is coded from very easy (1) to very hard (5) so that negative relationships are expected.

\*\* p < .01  
 \* p < .05

**TABLE 2**  
**Regression of Propensity to Leave on Independent Variables**

| Independent Variables                                 | Professional (n = 103) |          |        |                          | Managerial (n = 234) |          |        |                           | Technical (n = 389) |          |        |                            |
|---|------------------------|----------|--------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------|--------|---------------------------|---------------------|----------|--------|----------------------------|
|   | $\bar{X}$              | $\sigma$ | r      | $\beta$                  | $\bar{X}$            | $\sigma$ | r      | $\beta$                   | $\bar{X}$           | $\sigma$ | r      | $\beta$                    |
| Ease of movement                                      | 2.88                   | 1.23     | -.22** | -.18                     | 2.91                 | 1.17     | -.06   | -.09                      | 3.15                | 1.17     | .00    | -.05                       |
| Job satisfaction                                      | 3.99                   | 1.08     | -.32** | -.22*                    | 3.76                 | 1.01     | -.19** | -.16*                     | 3.42                | 1.20     | -.39** | -.42**                     |
| Expected intraorganizational mobility                 | .46                    | .80      | -.11   | -.15                     | .89                  | 1.11     | -.14*  | -.19**                    | 1.02                | 1.22     | -.12** | -.08                       |
| Interaction of ease and movement and job satisfaction | .04                    | .20      | .33*   | .18                      | .63                  | .18      | .28*   | .22**                     | .06                 | .23      | .21**  | .02                        |
| R <sup>E</sup> ( $\bar{R}^2$ )                        |                        |          |        |                          |                      |          |        |                           |                     |          |        |                            |
| F value (degrees of freedom)                          |                        |          |        | .19(.15)<br>5.28**(4,93) |                      |          |        | .13(.11)<br>7.75**(4,206) |                     |          |        | .19(.18)<br>21.52**(4,362) |

\*\* p < .01

\* p < .05

Thus, only age and tenure appear to be consistent factors which impact the visibility of individuals in the labor market.

When the seven independent variables are entered into multiple regression equations, the relative predictability of the model varies across samples. The variance explained in the perceived ease of movement ranges from 15 percent for the technical sample to 42 percent for the professional sample. Clearly a number of factors not identified by the model may help to explain ease of movement. An additional indirect test of the model was made by comparing the correlations of the job availability and visibilities factors with perceived ease of movement and the propensity to leave. General support for the model was discovered in that the independent variables were more strongly related to ease of movement than directly to the individual's propensity to leave the organization.

### **Propensity to Leave**

March and Simon (1958) delineate the perceived ease of movement and the perceived desirability of movement as the major determinants of the individual's propensity to leave the organization. Table 2 presents the results of the test of this model. As desirability of movement was not measured directly the relationship of job satisfaction and perceived intraorganizational mobility and the dependent variable are examined. As discovered in much of the past research, job satisfaction was significantly associated with the individual's propensity to leave for all three occupational groups. The more satisfied the person is with his job, the less likely he or she is to leave the organization. The opportunity to obtain an alternative job within the organization also has the hypothesized relationship with propensity to leave. The greater the perceived intraorganizational mobility possibilities the lower the probability the individual would leave the organization within a year. However, this relationship was only significant in the managerial and technical samples. The low level of variance in this measure for the professional sample may partially account for its lack of significance. When these determinants of the desirability of movement are included in an overall regression equation, job satisfaction remains significant in all three samples. However, only in the managerial sample are both job satisfaction and the perceived possibilities for intraorganizational mobility significant. Thus, as March and Simon (1958) suspected job satisfaction is much more important than alternative job opportunities within the organization in determining the individual's propensity to leave the organization.

The results related to the perceived ease of movement and the propensity to leave are much less supportive of the propositions of the model. This variable was only significantly correlated with the dependent variable for

the professional occupations. It is interesting to note that this group had the greatest perceived ease of movement. However, when included in the regression analysis, it only approached significance ( $p < .10$ ) as the predictor of the individual's propensity to leave the organization.

The final variable included in the model was designed to test the assumption that the propensity to leave would be greatest for those individuals who were *both* dissatisfied with their jobs *and* perceived ease of movement from the organization. The zero order correlations are strongly supportive of this hypothesis in all three occupational samples. Moreover, the regression results indicate that the interaction term made a significant independent contribution to explaining the variance in the propensity to leave for managers and approached significance ( $p < .10$ ) for professionals but failed to be a significant factor for the technical employees.

Despite the fact that most variables were significantly correlated with the propensity to leave as hypothesized by March and Simon (1958), the relative predictability of the model seems weak. Only between 13 and 19 percent of the variance in the individual's propensity to leave the organization was explained in the three samples examined in this research. Clearly more variables are operating on the decision to leave or alternative specifications of these variables are required.

## DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to provide a preliminary attempt at operationalizing March and Simon's (1958) model on the decision to participate. Overall, the results of the correlational analysis were very supportive of the model. Measures of business activity, extraorganizational alternatives, and personal characteristics which reflect visibility in the labor market were all significantly related to the perceived ease of movement. Furthermore, the perceived ease of movement, job satisfaction, perceived intraorganizational mobility possibilities, and the interaction of ease and desirability were significantly correlated with the individual's propensity to leave the organization. The multiple regression analysis showed, however, that different variables made independent contributions to explaining the dependent variables in the three different samples. Specifically, some individual characteristics were important in explaining ease of movement for one occupational group but not for the others (e.g., education in the professional sample). Perceived ease of movement also was only significant in explaining the propensity to leave for the professional employees. These differential results reiterate the need to test the external validity of research on the deci-

sion to leave as different factors may be important for different occupational categories.

The lack of significance of perceived ease of movement in this study was the most perplexing finding. Two possible explanations can be offered, however. First, an analysis of the managerial sample indicated that the perceived number of extraorganizational alternatives was significant in relation to propensity to leave ( $\beta = .13$ ;  $p < .057$ ) rather than the perceived ease of movement. Thus, it is possible that when individuals scan the labor market they pay attention to different information. For professionals, who have specialized skills, the relevant consideration may just involve having a single alternative available while for managers, whose skills are more generic, the greater the number of alternatives perceived the more likely they may be to consider moving, even though they may have perceived it to be easy to move when only one alternative was available. More importantly, while March and Simon (1958) place primary emphasis on the number of alternatives and the perceived ease of movement, a more appropriate measure might include an evaluation or expectancy of the desirability or utility of the available alternatives as well as an assessment of the number of available alternatives (Dansereau, Cashman, and Graen, 1974; Forrest, Cummings, and Johnson, 1977). It is likely that when an individual is considering leaving his or her present job, they evaluate not only whether or not another job is available but also how the available jobs compare on a variety of dimensions to the present job. Only when the relevant alternative job has a greater utility than the individual's present position, would the propensity to leave be expected to be high.

The results, while providing some support for the model, should be interpreted with caution. Individual items rather than multiple item indexes were used to assess most of the variables and as such it is difficult to judge the reliability of these measures. Although the propensity to leave has been found to be a strong predictor of actual turnover behavior (Kraut, 1975; Mobley *et al.*, 1978), a more powerful test of the model requires the use of actual turnover data. Finally, as all data were collected in the same questionnaire, the possibility of a response bias may also limit the reliability of the results. Thus, while the present study indicates some support for the model, more rigorous tests are required.

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## La tendance à laisser un emploi: examen préliminaire du modèle de March et Simon

Parmi les diverses attitudes des employés au travail, bien peu ont reçu moins d'attention que celle de quitter leur emploi (Price, 1977). March et Simon (1958) soutiennent que la décision de rester au service d'une organisation ou de la quitter dépend de la balance des avantages qui sont offerts à l'employé par l'organisation et des bénéfices qu'il lui apporte. Quand le poids des avantages par rapport aux bénéfices s'accroît, la propension de l'individu à quitter l'organisation diminue. La balance

se présente comme une fonction de deux mécanismes distincts: la désirabilité éprouvée de quitter l'organisation et la facilité d'abandon de l'organisation.

La satisfaction au travail et les possibilités perceptibles de déplacement à l'intérieur de l'organisation sont identifiées comme les déterminants premiers de la désirabilité qui est ressentie de quitter l'organisation. D'autre part, la facilité d'abandon de l'organisation que l'on perçoit reflète une évaluation des avantages disponibles ailleurs ou des avantages escomptés de garder l'emploi actuel. Le nombre des possibilités extérieures perceptibles par l'individu est le premier facteur identifié comme déterminant de la facilité de départ. Ceci dépend en retour du nombre d'organisations qui s'offrent à l'individu et qui embauchent des gens de qualifications équivalentes, du niveau de l'activité économique (chômage) et des caractéristiques personnelles des participants qui reflètent leur possibilité d'emploi sur le marché du travail ou par d'autres organisations (sexe, âge, statut social, stabilité).

March et Simon notent aussi que les deux principales composantes du modèle ne sont pas indépendantes. Ainsi, si un individu n'est pas satisfait de son emploi (et que, en conséquence, son désir de changement est élevé) mais qu'il se rend compte en même temps qu'il est difficile de changer d'emploi, la probabilité de départ sera faible. De même, si l'individu perçoit qu'il est facile de changer d'emploi, mais qu'il est satisfait du sien, la probabilité de départ sera également faible. En conséquence, la décision de quitter une organisation est plus susceptible de se produire, lorsque l'individu perçoit à la fois une grande facilité de départ et une forte désirabilité de changement.

La présente étude fut mise au point dans une tentative préalable afin d'appliquer dans le concret le modèle de March et Simon (1958). Les questionnaires furent distribués au hasard à un échantillon d'employés professionnels, cadres et techniques dans vingt-trois départements d'État. 759 ont retourné les questionnaires (une proportion de 69 pour cent). Une seule question, qui demandait aux répondants s'il était probable qu'ils quitteraient volontairement l'organisation au cours de l'année suivante, fut utilisée comme mesure de la propension au départ, c'est-à-dire la variable dépendante. Des questions appropriées furent utilisées pour établir la satisfaction au travail, la possibilité qu'ils percevaient d'être mutés à l'intérieur de l'organisation, la facilité de mouvement qu'ils ressentaient, les possibilités d'emploi à l'extérieur, le chômage, l'état des affaires, les caractéristiques personnelles et l'interaction d'une forte facilité de déplacement ressentie en même temps que la satisfaction au travail.

Les résultats de l'analyse corrélative confirment en grande partie le modèle en regard des déterminants de la facilité de déplacement perçue (tableau I). Le nombre des ouvertures à l'extérieur de l'organisation était reliée positivement à la facilité de déplacement que l'on percevait. De même, plus le taux de chômage était élevé, moins l'individu percevait la facilité de déplacement. Les particularités individuelles, reflétant la perception que la personne avait de la situation du marché du travail, étaient également significatives, bien que leur rapport variait selon l'échantillon.

Le tableau II présente les résultats de la vérification du modèle en utilisant la propension au départ comme variable dépendante. La satisfaction au travail était associée d'une façon significative à la tendance de l'individu à vouloir quitter son emploi pour les trois groupes professionnels. Plus la personne était satisfaite de son travail, moins elle songeait à quitter l'organisation. En outre, plus les possibilités de mutation étaient grandes à l'intérieur de l'organisation, moins était marquée la possibilité de départ pour les cadres et les techniciens. Cependant, la facilité de déplace-



ment perçue n'était qu'en corrélation significative avec la variable dépendante pour les occupations professionnelles. Enfin, une forte facilité de déplacement et le manque de satisfaction au travail étaient associés par interaction d'une façon significative à la volonté de quitter un emploi.

En dépit du fait que la plupart des variables étaient en corrélation d'une façon significative avec la propension à quitter l'emploi, tel qu'énoncé par March et Simon (1958), entre 13 et 19 pour cent seulement de la variation dans la variable dépendante trouvaient explication dans les trois échantillons examinés au cours de cette recherche. Sans conteste, un plus grand nombre de variables influencent la décision d'abandonner un emploi où des spécifications supplémentaires de ces variables sont nécessaires.

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