

**Impact of commitment on turnover intentions-An exploration
among pharmaceutical salespersons in India**

Avinash G Mulky

Professor,

Marketing

Indian Institute of Management Bangalore

Bannerghatta Road, Bangalore – 5600 76

Ph: 080-26993271

avinashgm@iimb.ernet.in

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Abstract

Firms in rapidly growing developing countries like India accord high priority to selecting and retaining qualified employees. Reducing attrition is an important goal. Previous research in developed countries has found that there is a significant negative relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intentions. This study examines the impact of professional commitment and organization commitment on job satisfaction and turnover intentions among pharmaceutical salespersons in India. Survey based data collection followed by structural equation modeling analysis suggested that both professional commitment and organizational commitment had significant positive relationships with job satisfaction. Professional commitment had a significant negative relationship with turnover intention. The relationship between organization commitment and turnover intention was negative but not significant.

Keywords: Professional commitment, organization commitment, job satisfaction, turnover intention, salespersons, India

Introduction and Objectives

Individuals working in organizations may entertain turnover intentions when they are not happy with their job or with the organization for which they work for. They may also harbor turnover intentions when they perceive opportunities for improving their remuneration and working conditions. In a healthy economy, a certain level of employee attrition is normal, but firms which invest substantial resources of time and money in selection, training and socialization, generally hate to lose good employees. Firms therefore implement employee retention strategies based on an analysis of the factors that impact turnover intentions and actual turnover.

Salespersons perform a boundary spanning role for firms. They operate at the boundary between a firm and its environment. Salespersons have to handle demands from both customers and from within the firm. At times they may have to adopt the customer's viewpoint and at other times,

they may be required to adopt the firm's viewpoint. Because of these multiple pulls and pressures, salespersons may experience role ambiguity, role conflict and stress leading to high levels of turnover intentions.

There is a considerable amount of academic research in developed country contexts on employee turnover intentions in general, and salesperson turnover intentions in particular. Prior research has identified a number of non-financial antecedents of turnover intentions. These include job dissatisfaction (Schulz, Bigonnes and Gagnon, 1987); upward mobility, education and age (Martin, 1979); burnout, (Babakus, Yavas, Ashill, 2011); work-family conflict (Blomme, van Heede and Tromp, 2010) etc. With specific reference to salespersons, antecedents of turnover intentions identified in literature include performance and job satisfaction (Johnston, Parasuraman and Futrell, 1998); ethical climate, job satisfaction and organization commitment (Schwepker, 2001); control, trust and justice (Brashear and Manolis, 2005); and ethical climate (Jaramillo, Mulki and Solomon, 2006).

There is very little research on the turnover intentions of employees in developing countries. This is surprising because recruiting and retaining qualified and motivated employees is a priority for firms in developing countries. Although there is often a large pool of potential candidates to draw from, the quality of education and training at school and undergraduate level leaves much to be desired (Farrel, Kaka and Sturze, 2005). Industry has to make sizeable investments in training and socialization in order to be able to bring new employees to a level where they can start contributing. Once these investments have been made, firms want to make sure that attrition levels of successful employees are low. Several developing countries are experiencing high rates of economic growth, entry of new firms into the market, a war for talent and rising wage levels. There is a large gap between availability of talent and demand for talent (Ready, Hill and Conger, 2008). Qualified and successful employees find it relatively easy to switch jobs and move into new firms and positions which offer more by way of remuneration, growth and challenge. Firms in developing countries have a need to understand not only the factors that influence employee turnover, but also the factors that influence retention and loyalty to the organization. Unfortunately there is little research based guidance available.

India is the second most populous country in the world. Although India is still a poor country and is designated a developing country or an emerging market, the country's economy has been growing rapidly since the liberalization introduced in 1991 and is now the fourth largest economy in the world. Many multinational firms have entered the Indian market since 1991. Since 2001, many Indian firms have started doing business in Asia, Europe, Africa, and North America (Khanna and Palepu, 2006). Firms in India compete fiercely not only for market share and growth but also for talented employees (Holtbrugge, Friedmann and Puck, 2010). Employee attrition rates in several industries in India remain high. Research which examines factors that influence turnover intentions would not only be useful from an academic perspective but would also be useful to firms while planning their retention strategies.

There is very little research on turnover intentions of salespersons in developing countries. A literature search yielded only three papers on salesperson turnover intentions. Chen (2000) explored the impact of employee demography on organizational commitment and turnover intentions in China. Mishra and Bhatnagar (2010) examined the linkages between emotional dissonance and organizational identification with turnover intentions and emotional wellbeing of salespersons in India. Ali and Baloch (2009) have investigated the predictors of organization commitment and turnover intentions of medical representatives in Pakistan. Given the paucity of research on the subject, there is need for more research on the factors influencing salesperson turnover intentions in developing countries.

This study examines turnover intentions of pharmaceutical salespersons in India based on a theoretical model involving constructs from prior research. The purpose is to validate the relationships between the constructs in the context of salespersons in a developing country. The findings will help to fill a gap in the literature about turnover intentions of salespersons and add to the body of knowledge on sales management and human resource management in developing countries. The specific research objectives are as follows:

- To explore the linkages between professional commitment, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and turnover intentions
- To find out the levels of turnover intentions among pharmaceutical salespersons in India.

- To examine if there are differences in turnover intentions based on salesperson work related differences

The findings of this study will be useful for managers who want to reduce attrition levels of employees handling sales responsibilities in the pharmaceutical industry. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section, the literature review, conceptual model and research hypotheses are presented. Next the methodology used in the study is described. The methodology section is followed by the results. The final section contains a summary of the findings, limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

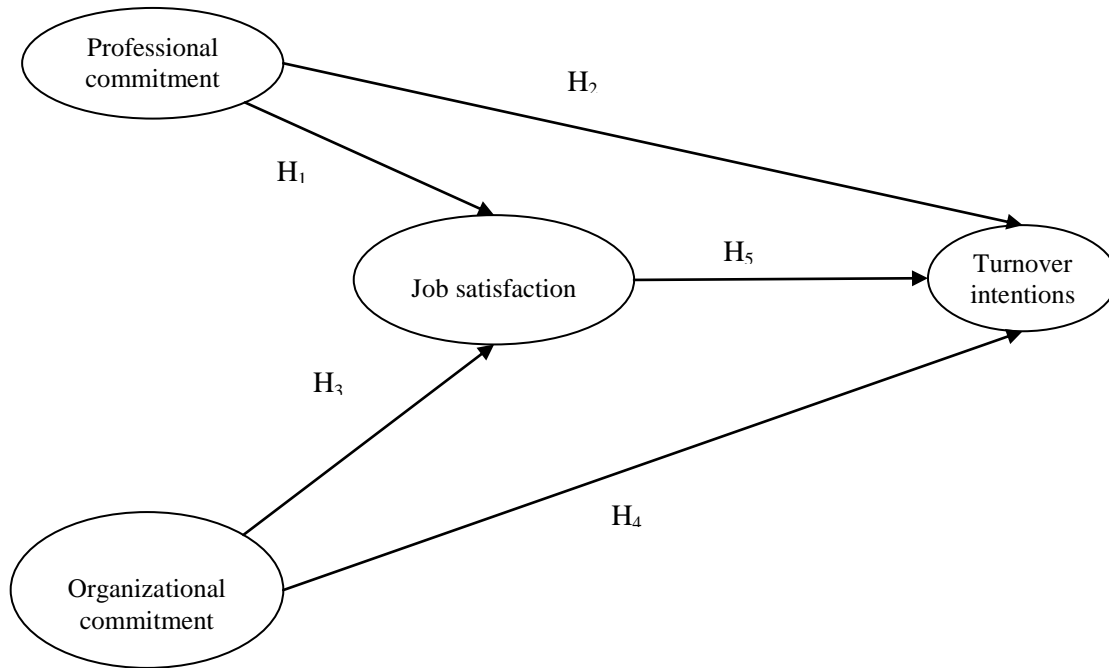
Research Model

This study is based on a theoretical model (Figure 1) which examines the turnover intentions of salespersons in India using three well established constructs from the organizational behavior literature-professional commitment, organizational commitment and job satisfaction. The relationship between these constructs has been examined in developed country contexts but not in the context of salespersons in developing countries like India.

Professional commitment

Professional commitment refers to identification with the values and norms of the person's profession, and pride in the profession and a desire to continue in the particular profession even if the person changes the job or organization. The consequences of professional commitment has been examined not only in the context of established professions like accounting and law (Gunz and Gunz, 1994) but also of other employees like project workers (Dwivedula and Bredillet, 2010) and highly educated research and development professionals (Chang and Choi, 2007) who do not belong to a profession in the classical sense. Several researchers have found that professional commitment has a positive correlation with job satisfaction and a negative correlation with turnover intentions (Lu et al., 2002; Lachman and Aranya, 1986; Ayree, Wyatt and Min, 1991).

Figure 1
Research Model



High levels of professional commitment can be expected in professions which have high entry barriers because of long periods of study, stiff certification requirements, a strong collegiate body of members, and a strong peer culture. Professional commitment can also be expected wherever the members of the profession have a possibility of practicing the profession either alone in private practice, or in a partnership firm formed by a small group of professionals. The exclusivity caused by entry barriers to the profession may be responsible for the development of the profession's values and norms with which members of the profession identify with.

Selling as a profession is respected in most developed countries. Salespersons in developed countries can join of a professional body with a large membership. Although entry into selling does not require long period of study or stiff certification, selling is not easy. Selling has been the subject of considerable academic and practical research for decades. There are even respected academic journals dealing exclusively with sales. Successful salespersons in developed countries

can earn very large incomes. Star salespersons can get inducted into “halls of fame” and earn respect from their fellow salespersons. Salespersons who work for organizations have opportunities to rise in the hierarchy right upto top of the organization.

The status of selling in developing countries is not as high as in developed countries. In India for example, bright students opt to go into sectors like medicine, engineering, government and the public sector. Salespersons are not held in very high esteem. However once a person enters the sales profession and receive basic training, they may start enjoying the features of the profession. Pharmaceutical salespersons have to visit doctors and communicate the unique features and efficacy of the formulations and products marketed by their firm. They have to make a certain number of calls per day in a defined geographic area. The job is well structured in terms of number of products to be detailed in each call and the manner in which the communication is to be made, and product samples to be given to doctors. Over time, salespersons may develop good relationships with the doctors they call on. While waiting for doctors at hospitals or clinics, salespersons may meet medical sales representatives from other companies. The spare time may be utilized to discuss aspects relating to the business. Pharmaceutical salespersons are required to participate in classroom training and on the job training in which they are observed by their managers. Due to the structured behavior expected from them, the inputs they receive and the networks they build, pharmaceutical salespersons may develop considerable amount of identity with their profession or commitment to their profession. They may also start enjoying their job especially the feelings of being useful to doctors and their own firms, the sense of control over how they communicate the features of their products and the sense of accomplishment they experience when doctors prescribe their products. Hence

H₁: Professional commitment is positively related to job satisfaction

Pharmaceutical selling is recognized as a specialized activity. Because of the limited number of calls they make and the nature of the customers they call on, pharmaceutical salespersons may get typecast into the particular role that they have been playing. Over time, they may have difficulties in adjusting to new roles. Salespersons with high levels of professional commitment may experience less interest in moving to another position either with or outside the firm. Hence

in line with earlier studies in other professions (Lu et al., 2002; Lachman and Aranya, 1979; Ayree, Wyatt and Min, 1991):

H₂: Professional commitment is negatively related to turnover intentions.

Organizational commitment

Organization commitment refers to an individual's identification with the values and goals of the organization and a willingness to work for the welfare of the organization. An individual who has a high level of organization commitment believes that the organization is a great place to be in, and would like to remain with the organization in the future. Organization commitment has been found to have a positive correlation with job satisfaction and a negative correlation with turnover intentions (Mathieu and Zajac 1990).

Previous research in sales management (Brown and Petersen, 1993) has found that job satisfaction has a positive influence on organization commitment. On the other hand, Lachman and Aranya (1986) have successfully two models in which organization commitment precedes job satisfaction. In the case of pharmaceutical salespersons one will expect that job satisfaction will lead to organization commitment. However we must note that in India, society values membership of well known firms. Therefore if a salesperson develops organization commitment, it is likely that there will be a feeling of great pride and belongingness in being a member of the particular firm. This feeling of commitment to the organization may lead to higher levels of job satisfaction. Hence

H₃: Organization commitment is positively related to job satisfaction.

Meta-analytic findings (Tett and Meyer, 1993) suggest that organization commitment has a negative influence on turnover intentions. Similar results have been found in sales research. This relationship can be expected to hold in India also. A salesperson who is committed to the organization and is motivated to exert effort on behalf of the organization is less likely to want to leave and move to another organization. Hence

H4: Organization commitment is negatively related to turnover intentions.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is one of the most extensively variables within organization behavior and sales management. Job satisfaction indicates the extent to which people like their jobs (Spector, 1997). Job satisfaction has a number of consequences like performance, organization citizenship behaviors and life satisfaction. Prior research has found that dissatisfaction on the job can lead to turnover intentions, withdrawal, physical and emotional exhaustion, burnout and ill health.

Several studies among salespersons have indicated that job satisfaction has a negative correlation with turnover intentions (Brashear et al., 2003; Babakus et al, 1996). This negative relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intentions can be expected to hold in India too but for a different reason. The economy in India is currently growing at a fast pace and pharmaceutical salespersons will have many opportunities to move into higher paying jobs in other pharmaceutical firms. In the past, employment opportunities have not been plentiful. Indian society has experienced a long period of shortage and deprivation. Indian society tends to be conservative and values stability and security and someone who changes jobs regularly is not looked upon very favorably. Hence in the Indian context, employees with high levels of job satisfaction may experience lower levels of turnover intention. Hence:

H5: Job satisfaction is negatively related to turnover intention.

Method

Survey

The study is based on a survey of pharmaceutical salespersons. The questionnaire for the survey was developed in English. Although India's national language is English and the country has many languages and dialects, English is widely spoken and understood. The medium of instruction in medical education for doctors is English and therefore medical and pharmaceutical information is generally presented in English. Pharmaceutical salespersons understand and use English in their work with doctors and hospitals.

Measures

The constructs used in this study are professional commitment, organization commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. These constructs already exist in the literature on organization behavior. The constructs have been measured using scales taken from published studies. Each construct was measured using between two and four items and the final questionnaire had a total of 11 items. Professional commitment had 3 items from Speir and Vishwanath (2002). Organization commitment had three items slightly modified from Speir and Vishwanath (2002). Job satisfaction was measured using three items from Brown and Petersen (1993) and turnover intentions were measured using four items from Bluedorn (1982) and Brashear et al., (2003). Each item was measured using a seven point Likert type scale. Details of the individual measurement items, their source and the reliability statistics are provided in Appendix 1. A marketing professor at a leading business school and a sales manager with a leading pharmaceutical examined the questionnaire before it was sent for field testing. The questionnaire was pretested by getting it filled up by 15 pharmaceutical salespersons picked at random from those who visited a large hospital to meet doctors. The salespersons did not indicate any difficulty with understanding the questions and filling the questionnaire

Sample

The survey was carried out in the city of Bangalore, which is the capital of Karnataka state in South India. Bangalore is one of the major centres of India's IT industry and home to the research and development units of many multinational companies. The city's salubrious climate and growing industrial activity has attracted settlers from all over India. Hence Bangalore is considered to be quite cosmopolitan and is supposed to be a good representation of urban India. Bangalore has many large hospitals which are visited regularly by pharmaceutical salespersons. The survey was done by visiting hospitals over a two week period. Salespersons were approached while they were waiting for appointments with doctors and were requested to participate in the survey. Of the 190 salespersons approached, 140 salespersons agreed to participate. The survey produced 121 complete questionnaires. There was a good spread of respondent characteristics with adequate representation across age, experience, affiliation to Indian/foreign firms and level of education. Sixty two percent of respondents were under 30

years of age and 31.4% were between 31 and 40 years old. Forty two percent of respondents had less than 5 years of experience, a little over 30.6% had experience of between 6 and 10 years, 20.7% had experience of between 11 and 15 years. Fifty six percent of the pharmaceutical salespersons in the sample worked for Indian firms and the rest worked for foreign firms. Seventy seven percent of respondents were graduates and the remaining were post graduates.

Since no data is available about the distribution of these characteristics in the population of pharmaceutical salespersons in India, it is not possible to confirm if the sample in this study is fully representative. Hence it may be considered as a convenience sample.

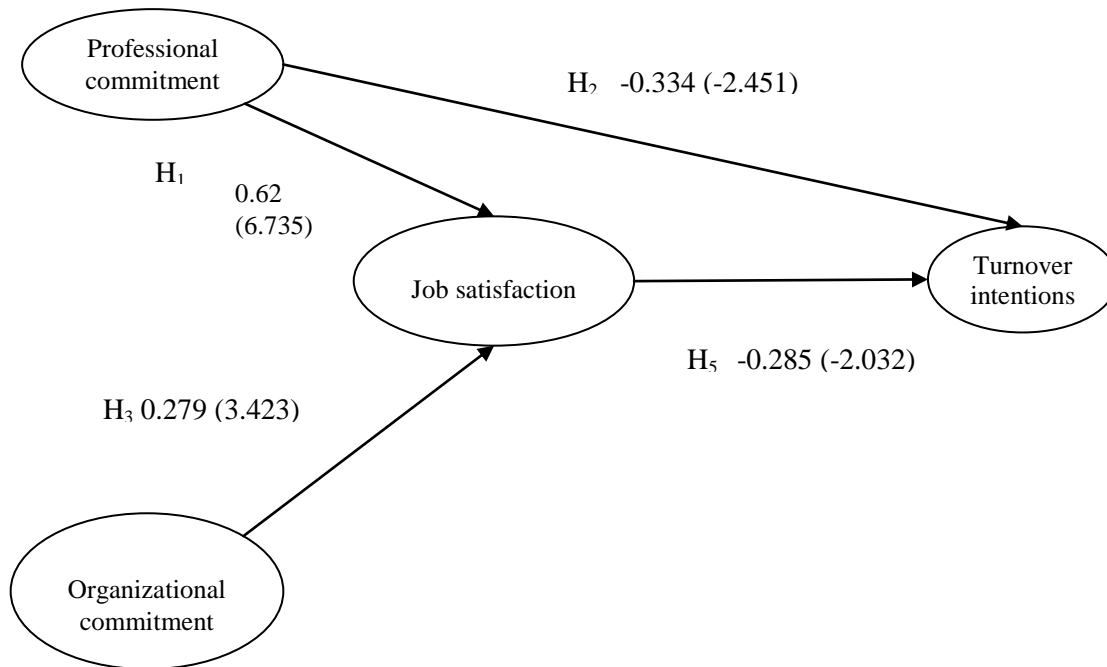
Findings

Following the two-step approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a measurement model was specified and evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis in AMOS. CFA results indicated that the measurement model had good fit. All the indicators loaded on the respective latent factors. The values of standardized loadings, average variance extracted, and construct reliability are shown in Appendix 1. The standardized loadings for the indicator variables ranged from 0.72 to 0.995. In view of the fact that all loadings are above the level of 0.7 there is evidence of good convergent validity. The average variance extracted for each of the four constructs ranged from 0.8 to 0.927 which is another indication of good convergent validity. Construct reliability was calculated for each construct and was found to range from 0.7 to 0.87 which suggests a good level of discriminant validity. The average variance extracted for each construct was higher than the squares of the inter construct correlations associated with each construct suggesting further evidence of discriminant validity. The χ^2 value for the measurement model was 68 with 38 degrees of freedom. The fit indices were GFI=0.913, TLI = 0.956, and CFI = 0.970 which indicate a good fit. Finally the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.08 which is within the acceptable range.

Figure 2

Results of structural model

Standardized path coefficients with *t* values in parenthesis



After evaluating the measurement model, the testing of the structural model shown in Figure 1 was undertaken using the AMOS package. The results for the estimation of the structural model are shown in Figure 2 and the standardized path coefficients and *t* values are shown in Table 2. The model had a good overall fit with χ^2 of 68 with 38 degrees of freedom. The fit indices of GFI=0.913, TLI = 0.956, CFI = 0.97 are in the acceptable range. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.08 is also within the acceptable range.

Hypothesis 1 had predicted a positive relationship between professional commitment and job satisfaction. H_1 was supported with a standardized path coefficient of 0.62, $t=6.735$ and $p < .001$. As predicted by hypotheses H_2 , professional commitment was negatively related to turnover intentions. The standardized path coefficient between professional commitment and turnover

intentions was -0.334 with $t=-2.451$ and $p < .05$. In line with the prediction of hypothesis H₃, the path between organization commitment and job satisfaction was significant and positive with a standardized path coefficient of 0.279 and $t=3.423$, $p < .001$. Hypothesis H₄ had predicted that organization commitment would be negatively related to turnover intention. H₄ was not supported since the path between organization commitment and turnover intentions was not significant. Hypothesis H₅ predicted a negative relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intentions. H₅ found support with a standardized path coefficient of -0.285, $t= -2.032$, $p < .05$.

TABLE 2
Standardized parameter estimates from Structural Model

	Standardized estimate	<i>t</i> value	Hypothesis supported
Professional Commitment → Job satisfaction H ₁	+0.620	6.375	Supported
Professional commitment → Turnover intentions H ₂	-0.334	-2.451	Supported
Organizational commitment → Job satisfaction H ₃	+0.279	3.423	Supported
Organizational commitment → Turnover intentions H ₄	-0.128	0.244	No support
Job satisfaction → Turnover intentions H ₅	-0.285	-2.032	Supported

Discussion

The study's hypothesis with respect to the positive relationship between professional commitment and job satisfaction was supported. The hypothesis of a negative relationship between professional commitment and turnover intentions was also supported. These findings are in line with previous research in developed countries with non-sales respondents (Lachman and Aranya, 1986; Lu et al, 2002; Ayree, Wyatt and Min, 1991). Professional commitment in this study was measured using three items which represented pride in the profession, a sense of belonging to the profession and a readiness to communicate to friends about the value of the profession. The positive relationship between professional commitment and job satisfaction

suggests that identification with the profession contributes to the enjoyment of the job. The negative relationship between professional commitment and turnover intention suggests that when an individual values membership of a profession, he or she may seek to attain job related objectives in the present job rather than thinking of moving to another job. This is interesting because in India, selling as a profession has not had the same status and glamour that some other established professions like medicine, engineering and accounting have in society. Going forward, it may be possible to strengthen the professional identity of pharmaceutical salespersons through professional development activities and professional forums since these activities will improve job satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions. Such activities may also help to attract more qualified entrants into selling which will be useful as the technological sophistication of products marketed increases.

The hypothesis regarding the positive relationship between organization commitment and job satisfaction was supported. This is in line with previous research and meta-analytic findings (Lu et al, 2002; Ayree, Wyatt and Min, 1991). Organization commitment was measured in this study using two items representing that the relationship with the firm was important and the individual is committed to the relationship. The positive relationship between organization commitment and job satisfaction indicates that when an employee identifies with the goals and values of the organization and is willing to work for the organization, job satisfaction is enhanced. In the Indian context, this suggests that factors beyond remuneration and incentives are contributing to job satisfaction. Specifically, the contribution of organizational values and norms in job satisfaction is noteworthy. From a human resource perspective, it indicates that the organizational context of culture, supervision, peer relations, recognition, opportunity to contribute etc. are valued by the employee who uses the overall value provided by the organization as a basis for identification.

The relationship between organization commitment and turnover intentions was negative but was not statistically significant. The reason for this non-significant path could be the existence of some moderators in the relationship. These may be dependent on type of organization-Indian or foreign, large or small, location of organization etc. The lack of significance in the negative relationship may arise due to committed employees entertaining turnover intentions when they

have opportunities of moving to positions located in their home town or positions with firms having a higher status in the market. More research is needed to understand the lack of significance in this relationship.

The hypothesis of a negative relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention was supported. This is in line with a large number of prior studies. When an individual enjoys the job and finds satisfaction in it, the individual for thinking finds few reasons for thinking of moving to another job. This expected finding lends support to the idea that firms must track job satisfaction closely as this is a good predictor of turnover intentions.

Managerial implications

Professional commitment has a positive effect on both job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Firms must implement processes that enable the development of professional culture within selling which will lead to greater professional commitment. Some activities can be done within the firm, others can be done in conjunction with professional forums. Organization commitment has a positive relationship with job satisfaction. Hence firms can regularly measure both these variables and track them since job satisfaction is related to turnover intentions and is a good metric to manage in the effort to improve bonding with the firm and reduce attrition.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

The survey on which this study is based was done only in one city-Bangalore and in one industry- pharmaceuticals. Since India is a large country with considerable diversity in terms of economic and social development, the findings of this study may not apply to other geographic areas. Moreover, differences in the nature of sales work across industries may limit the applicability of these findings to other industries. Although the scale had good levels of construct reliability and average variance extracted, two of the four constructs-job satisfaction and organization commitment were measured using just two items each. This may limit the ability to compare the results obtained in this study with those of other studies that have examined these two constructs.

There are many areas for future research in sales management in developing countries such as India. The rapid growth of the industry requires salespersons and sales managers to be capable of making changes in their way of working. Change often causes anxiety and stress. The nature of stress that salespeople and sales managers face in developing countries face will be a fruitful area for research. A related area for research is the study of burnout among salespersons in developing countries. Another important area is research on the impact of ethical climate on salespersons' commitment, job satisfaction and turnover. In future, the technological sophistication of products marketed in developing countries can be expected to increase. Many technically qualified employees may be entrusted with sales responsibilities. In this scenario research on overqualification and its impact on job attitudes could become a potential research topic. These are an illustrative list of topics that can be addressed in future research in developing countries.

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Appendix 1

Individual Measurement Items

	Standardized Loadings	Average Variance Extracted	Construct Reliability
<u>Professional commitment</u> (Speir and Vishwanath, 2002) I am really proud to tell others that I am part of this profession I tell my friends that this is a great profession to work for I feel a sense of belongingness to this profession	0.855 0.942 0.872	0.856	0.76
<u>Job satisfaction</u> (Brown and Petersen, 1993) I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job I feel a great sense of satisfaction from my job	0.860 0.995	0.927	0.87
<u>Organization commitment</u> (Speir and Vishwanath, 2002) The relationship my company has with me is something I am committed to The relationship my company has with me is important to me	0.817 0.911	0.864	0.77
<u>Turnover intentions</u> (Adapted from Bluedorn, 1982) I think often about quitting my present job I am constantly searching for a better alternative I am actively seeking a new role (an activity different from my present job) I am thinking of quitting this job	0.854 0.886 0.733 0.727	0.799	0.7