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# Negative relationships in the workplace: Associations with organisational commitment, cohesion, job satisfaction and intention to turnover

RACHEL L MORRISON

School of Business, AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand

## ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the link between perceptions of negative workplace relationships and organisational outcomes. Respondents (n = 412) spanned a wide range of occupations, industries and nationalities. Data were collected using an Internet-based questionnaire. Results indicated that those with at least one negative relationship at work were significantly less satisfied, reported less organisational commitment, were part of less cohesive workgroups and were significantly more likely to be planning to leave their job.*

Keywords: workplace relationships; organisational commitment; cohesion; job satisfaction; turnover

Recent research has suggested that relationships characterised by rude and uncivil behaviour may be becoming increasingly common in the workplace (Pearson & Porath 2003). According to Cortina, Magley, Williams and Langhout (2001) 71 percent of workers have been insulted, demeaned, ignored, or otherwise mistreated by their co-workers and superiors. Much of the research in this area has examined direct aggression with a clear intent to physically harm (for reviews of workplace violence see Griffin, O'Leary-Kelly & Collins 1998; Leather, Brady, Lawrence, Beale & Cox 1999). There has also been some work with a focus on psychological aggression, or behaviours that inflict psychological, rather than physical harm (Campion et al

1993; Mobley 1977; Mowday et al 1979; Nielsen, Jex & Adams 2000; Warr et al 1979). Other research has examined an even milder (but possibly far more prevalent) form of negative behaviour, focusing on rudeness and incivility at work (Campion et al 1993; Mobley 1977; Nielsen, Jex & Adams 2000; Warr et al 1979). Regardless of the intensity of the behaviour, relationships characterised by violence, rudeness, aggression and/or incivility are very likely negative relationships.

The impact of social relationships on employee well-being has long been of interest to researchers, often in the form of research with a focus on the positive impact of social support (Campion et al 1993; Mobley 1977; Mowday

etal 1979; Nielsen, Jex & Adams 2000; Warr et al 1979). The impact of *negative* social relations, or enmities, is a topic that has received less attention, particularly in the work environment. This impact of negative relationships on organisational outcomes has seldom been examined previously and is the focus of the current study. In addition, the question of *which* organisational variables are most strongly associated with the presence of negative relationships is addressed. Thus, the current study seeks to explore the extent to which negative relationships in the workplace are related to job satisfaction, organisational commitment, workgroup cohesion and intention to turnover.

While there is little empirical research documenting the effects of negative relationships at work, the literature on negative workplace behaviours such as aggression, injustice, unfairness bullying and incivility will be briefly reviewed here. Although these constructs do not completely overlap with that of the negative workplace relationship, they are sufficiently related to inform hypotheses on these relationships.

### Conceptualising negative relationships

Although no standard definition of negative relationships yet exists they can be defined in terms of the verbal interaction within a dyad; with communication ranging from '.....passive to active dislike, animosity, disrespect, or destructive mutual interaction' (Dillard & Fritz 1995: 12). Andersson and Pearson (1999) define incivility as low intensity deviant behaviour which violates organisational norms for mutual respect. A negative relationship is one where interactions such as concealment, manipulation, conflict, disrespect, disagreement, incivility and/or animosity are frequent. These relationships have been shown to affect both individuals (Moerbeek & Need 2003; Rook 1984) and organisations (Dillard & Fritz 1995) adversely, causing stress and turnover (Leather, Beale, Lawrence & Dickson 1997; Miner-Rubino 2004). The lack of respect and courtesy which exemplifies negative relationships

often results in conflict and incivility which can be both time consuming and stressful to resolve. Dealing with conflict between workers may account for as much as 13 percent of a managers' time, or nearly seven weeks per year, per manager (Johnson & Indvik 2001).

As well as unpleasant *verbal communication*, negative relationships may also be characterised by poor behaviour (Johnson & Indvik 2001). Workplace behaviour within negative relationships can include sending a nasty note, undermining credibility, sabotaging another's work, unfairly withholding or distributing valued resources or giving 'dirty looks'. Einarsen (2000) adds to this list, describing a hostile work environment as one where behaviours such as insulting, teasing, offensive remarks or silence and hostility when entering a conversation take place. Einarsen describes workers being socially excluded from their work group and having their work and efforts devalued. Some individuals are even subjected to physical abuse, or threats of such abuse, from co-workers or supervisors (Einarsen 2000). Some behaviour may be interpreted differently by different individuals or by those from other cultural backgrounds (for example, behaviour interpreted by one individual as rude or brusque may be viewed by another as efficient or no-nonsense) (Johnson & Indvik 2001). Thus, as workplaces become more diverse, the potential for misunderstandings and hostility increases along with the number of negative relationships.

Moerbeek and Need (2003) have published one of the few studies specifically looking at the effects of negative relationships in work environments, providing an alternate conceptualisation of negative workplace relationships. Rather than focusing on interactions between individuals, Moerbeek and Need define negative relationships in the context of social capital. The people a person knows, their social network, can be either helpful or harmful to their future career. Moerbeek and Need term relationships which have a negative effect 'sour social capital', and they use the term *foes* to refer to a person's sour social capi-

tal, stating that almost anyone in a person's social network can become a foe.

Moerbeek and Need (2003) state that the one major difference between friends and enemies is that people do not choose to have foes in their social network; relationships with foes will be involuntary relationships. When a relationship degrades or turns sour in a workplace the individuals concerned often have to continue to interact. The workplace is one of the few environments where people are 'forced' into relationships with others and, as a result, it is an ideal environment to examine these negative relationships. Negative interactions, along with the involuntariness of the relationship comprise the two aspects of the definition of negative relationships used in this study.

### **The causes of negative relationships**

Although it is the outcomes, rather than the causes, of negative relationships that are the focus the current study, some antecedents of these relationships are worth noting. An important study was conducted by Sias, Heath, Perry, Silva and Fix (2004). These authors outline five specific causes of deteriorating relationships; personality, distracting life events, conflicting expectations, promotion and betrayal. The sheer proximity of work colleagues is probably the most common antecedent of negative relationships. People are seldom in a position to choose who they work with so, if an individual continually has to interact and work with a person with whom they do not get along, the potential for increasingly antagonistic behaviour exists (Dillard & Fritz 1995).

Organisational environments may provide other elements conducive to the development of negative relationships. Work demands, particularly in situations where workers are in direct competition with one another, can create situations where negative relationships are likely to form. In addition, the demands of electronic communication, to which many feel obliged to respond immediately, creates pressures that encourage workers to behave rudely (Johnson & Indvik

2001). Thus, aspects of work (such as overload and stress) can cause people to behave in ways likely to create negative relationships. Downsizing and rapid organisational growth create situations where fewer people are doing more work. If employees are unable to handle the increasing pressure and are under stress they are less likely to exercise good judgement in terms of their interactions with colleagues and more likely to view others as enemies (Johnson & Indvik 2001). Combined with other factors, such as personality or an unhealthy organisational climate, the workplace can cause a previously benign relationship to escalate into a hostile one.

Additionally people may obstruct each other for reasons of jealousy or envy (Cohen-Charash 2001). Envy is common in businesses and organisations, and may be defined as an emotion occurring when a person begrudges another for having something that he or she does not have, or seeing another individual gain advantage and viewing it with displeasure (Bedeian 1995). The way that limited resources are distributed creates an environment where envy is not only possible but almost inevitable. For example, people may have to compete for resources or individuals might have incompatible goals. Envious people are likely react with hostility and violence towards the other (Cohen-Charash 2001).

### **The effects of negative workplace relationships**

It is reasonable to expect that the presence of a negative relationship will adversely affect an individual's experience of work. If someone is experiencing rudeness, undermining and/or incivility in the workplace, they are likely to be less satisfied, committed or happy in their job than someone not having to deal with interpersonal negativity.

### **Job satisfaction**

Job satisfaction may be defined as a pleasurable, positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Levy 2003). Levy states that consequences of satisfac-

tion include better performance and a reduction in withdrawal and counterproductive behaviours. Previous research with a focus on negative behaviours including unjust treatment (Donovan, Drasgow & Munson 1998; Moorman 1991), verbal abuse and bullying (Einarsen 2000), and psychological aggression and harassing (Einarsen & Raknes 1997) has linked these behaviours with lowered satisfaction with work, supervision and/or co-workers. Although it has not been examined previously, negative relationships are likely to be differently related to the extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of job satisfaction. It is probable that intrinsic satisfaction (satisfaction with aspects of the job itself, that is positive evaluations of the variety in one's job or the opportunity to use one's abilities) will be less affected by negative relationships than satisfaction with the more extrinsic factors, such as 'immediate boss' or 'fellow workers'. That is, people may be able to separate their satisfaction with the actual activities, achievements or recognition in their jobs (intrinsic satisfaction) from their satisfaction with other aspects of their day to day work life (extrinsic satisfaction). Hypotheses *a* and *b* focus on the link between negative relationships and job satisfaction.

*Hypothesis a:* The presence of negative relationships within the workplace will be associated with reduced job satisfaction.

*Hypothesis b:* The presence of negative relationships within the workplace will be more strongly associated with extrinsic job satisfaction than intrinsic job satisfaction.

### **Turnover intentions**

Turnover represents one of the most important issues for any organisation. The money and time invested in hiring and training an individual who leaves the organisation is lost forever. These costs are considerable, recent research by Waldman, Kelly, Arora and Smith (2004) within the medical industry, revealed that the minimum cost of turnover represented a loss of more than five per-

cent of the total annual operating budget. In addition, the costs of turnover increase further up the organisational hierarchy, ie replacing a senior manager or a surgeon represents a more significant cost than replacing a secretary or a nurse (Richer, Blanchard & Vallerand 2002). An American study by Lozada (1996) found that 90 percent of dismissals are the result of poor attitudes, inappropriate behaviour and difficulties with interpersonal relationships rather than deficient technical skills. The finding that people are so often dismissed for reasons other than being unable to do their jobs highlights the importance of informal interpersonal relationships at work; being good at your job is not sufficient if you cannot *with* people. Thus, the informal relationships employees have at work are likely to have a significant effect on turnover; both on whether employees choose to stay in their jobs (Campion et al 1993; Mobley 1997; Mowday et al 1979; Nielsen, Jex & Adams 2000; Warr et al 1979), and on whether organisations want them to remain or decide to end their employment (Lozada 1996).

Donovan, Drasgow and Munson (1998) report that turnover intentions would be increased with the presence of negative workplace behaviours. This finding was supported by Moerbeek and Need (2003), who found that people who experience a bad atmosphere at work leave more quickly than people who experience a good atmosphere. Hypothesis *c* focuses on the link between negative relationships and intention to turnover.

*Hypothesis c:* The presence of negative relationships within the workplace will be associated with increased intention to turnover.

### **Organisational commitment**

Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian (1974) define organisational commitment as a strong belief in, and acceptance of, the organisational goals and values, a willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organisation and a desire to remain in the organisation. Consequences of organisational commitment include a reduction in withdrawal

behaviours such as absenteeism (Levy 2003; Mathieu & Zajac 1990) and intention to leave. In addition Levy suggests that commitment will result in a reduction in counterproductive behaviours such as theft and sabotage. Another consequence of commitment is improved performance, although, because of the complexity of performance, the relationship between performance and commitment is not strong (Levy 2003). Both intention to turnover and job satisfaction are strongly related to organisational commitment (Campion et al 1993; Mobley 1977; Nielsen, Jex & Adams 2000; Warr et al 1979). If negative relationships are associated with lower satisfaction and increased intention to turnover it is also reasonable to assume that organisational commitment will be reduced. Barling and Phillips (1993) found a link between perceptions unfair treatment and decreased organisational commitment, and Leather et al (1997) examined violence at work, also finding (perhaps unsurprisingly) that those on the receiving end of these behaviours experienced lowered commitment to the organisation. Hypothesis *d* focuses on the link between negative relationships and organisational commitment.

*Hypothesis d:* The presence of negative relationships within the workplace will be associated with lowered organisational commitment.

### **Cohesion**

Odden and Sias (1997) found that climates perceived as being highly cohesive were associated with larger proportions of collegial and special peer relationships, ie more friends. The cohesion dimension in the workplace reflects a general liking of one's co-workers, as well as perceptions that an employee shares a great deal of common ground with his/her colleagues. Although Odden and Sias (1997) did not examine a link between negative relationships and cohesion, the fact that cohesion reflects friendly relations and liking as well as cooperation and positive communication, suggests that the presence of negative relationships would mitigate perceptions of a cohesive

workgroup. Hypothesis *e* focuses on the link between negative relationships and cohesion.

*Hypothesis e:* The presence of negative relationships within the workplace will be associated with less workgroup cohesion.

In sum, the overall research question posed in the current study is; to what extent are negative relationships in the workplace related to job satisfaction, intention to turnover, organisational commitment and workgroup cohesion?

## **METHODS**

### **Participants**

Data were collected from 412 individuals; the demographic data indicated that the respondents were very diverse, there was a wide range of ages and industries and 31% were male. Most respondents were from New Zealand (68%) with 13% being from the United States. Respondents ranged in age from 19 years to 64 years, with a mean age of 35 years. There was a great deal of variety in the industries/sectors respondents reported working in. The largest reported sector was tertiary education (universities and polytechnics,  $n = 92$ ) followed by health care (including psychology, psychiatry and physiotherapy  $n = 53$ ) (refer Table 1). As there were no exclusion criteria (other than having a job) the variety in responses to the question asking what job type individuals had, was almost as varied as the number of respondents. Respondents were from a wide range of professions, from medical doctors, to secretaries, to academics, to police officers.

### **Materials**

#### ***Negative relationship questionnaire***

To establish if respondents had negative relationships in the workplace they were given the definition below. Respondents were then asked if there were any people who they work with, with whom they had a negative relationship and, if so, how many.



TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Variable	Frequency (n)	Valid percent
<b>Sex</b> (6 missing)		
Males	127	31.3
Females	279	67.7
<b>Age</b> (mean 35.23, SD 11.07) (6 missing)		
>20 years	8	2.0
20–29 years	150	37.0
30–39 years	116	28.6
40–49 years	70	17.2
50–59 years	57	14.0
Over 60 years	5	1.2
<b>Country of origin</b> (5 missing)		
New Zealand	277	68.1
USA	52	12.8
United Kingdom	33	8.1
Australia	20	4.9
Canada	5	1.2
Other	20	4.9

Note: Values are presented in percentages excluding respondents who declined to answer

This person is not one of your friends. You do interact with this person on a fairly regular basis but you would definitely not continue the relationship if you did not work here. Your interactions with this person are characterised by disrespect, disagreement, dislike, conflict and/or animosity. You would rather not have to interact with this person.

As discussed earlier, negative interactions and the involuntariness of the relationships comprise the two aspects of the definition of negative relationships. The definition was written by the researcher to include these two characteristics of negative relationships, and was based on Kram and Isabella's (1985) definitions of organisational peer types.

### **Workgroup cohesion scale**

Cohesion was measured using a nine-item workgroup cohesion scale rated on a 5-point Likert type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree (eg *Members of my team are very willing to share*

*information with other team members about our work*). Items measuring cohesion were selected from a 54-item Work Group Characteristics Measure developed by Campion et al (1993). Only those items from the Work Group Characteristics Measure relating to cohesion were used in the current study. The items used are termed process characteristics by Campion et al and are those relating to (1) social support, (2) workload sharing and (3) communication/co-operation within the work group. Campion et al provided evidence that a composite of these items reliably predicted effectiveness criteria (productivity and manager judgements of effectiveness ( $P < 0.05$ )). In addition Campion et al found the sub scales had adequate internal consistency reliability ( $\alpha = 0.78, 0.84$  and  $0.81$  respectively).

### **Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ)**

Originally designed by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979), this is a commonly used measure

of employee's affective attachment to an organisation (Meyer & Allen 1991). The OCQ is a 15-item scale, designed to assess acceptance of organisational values, desire to remain with the organisation and willingness to exert effort (eg *I am proud to tell others I am part of this organisation*). Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) have provided strong evidence for the test-retest reliability, convergent validity, internal consistency, and predictive validity of the OCQ, finding the overall measure of organisational commitment to be relatively stable over time ( $r = 0.53, 0.63$  and  $0.75$  over two-, three- and four-month periods), demonstrating test-retest reliability. Mowday et al calculated internal consistency using coefficient alpha, item analysis and factor analysis, finding coefficient alpha to be consistently high, ranging from 0.82 to 0.93 with a median of 0.90. Item analysis indicated that each item had a positive correlation with the total score for the OCQ, with the range being from 0.32 to 0.72. In addition, factor analysis resulted in a single factor solution. Internal consistency results suggest the 15 items of the OCQ are relatively homogeneous with respect to the underlying attitude construct they measure. Significant correlations were found between the OCQ scores and 'intention to remain with the organisation' across several studies, illustrating convergent validity. In addition, Mowday et al found the OCQ to correlate significantly with scores from the Organisational Attachment

Questionnaire (convergent validities across six diverse samples ranged from 0.63 to 0.74).

### **Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS)**

The JSS used was one part of a larger battery of eight scales devised by Warr, Cook and Wall (1979). Only the 15-item scale relating to job satisfaction was used for this study. Respondents indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied they feel with each of 15 aspects of their job (eg *The recognition you get for good work*). Items are rated on a 7-point Likert type scale from very dissatisfied to very satisfied. The JSS has been found to be reliable, Warr, Cook and Wall (1979) reported that the test-retest correlation co-efficient of the JSS was 0.63. Warr et al found, using cluster analysis, that items clustered together into intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction subscales.

### **Measure of intention to turnover**

Intention to turnover was measured with three items theorised to be important precursors to turnover; thinking of quitting, intention to search for alternative employment, and intention to quit (Chang 1999; Mobley 1977; Mobley, Horner & Hollingsworth 1978) (eg *I will probably quit my job in the next year*). Answers to each item were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables in the current study.

To further test the validity of the measures and to illustrate the relationships between them,

**TABLE 2: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

Scale/Sub-scale	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	$\alpha$
Friendship opportunities	1	5	4.20	0.61	0.82
Friendship prevalence	1	5	3.52	0.89	0.71
Job satisfaction (extrinsic)	1	7	5.29	1.12	0.73
Job satisfaction (intrinsic)	1	7	5.09	1.35	0.80
Cohesion (social support/cooperation)	1	5	3.98	0.63	0.83
Cohesion (workload sharing)	1	5	3.36	0.88	0.81
Organisational Commitment	1	7	4.50	1.21	0.91
Intention to leave scale	1	7	3.81	2.06	0.87



Table 3 shows the correlations between the composite scores of the items remaining in each measure after confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), all correlations are significant and in the expected direction.

### Procedure

Ethics approval to conduct the research was obtained from MUHEC (Massey University Human Ethics committee). Initially two email lists, EmoNet (an international interest group of academics and practitioners working in the field of emotions in organisations) and IOnet (an interest group of industrial/organisational psychologists) as well as 60 people employed in professional roles in New Zealand and Australia, were sent an email inviting them to complete an online questionnaire which included a link to a data collection site. These groups were selected for their interest in this research and for their opportunities to forward information about the research to other professionals and employees. The snowball technique was used with all recipients being encouraged to pass it on to friends and colleagues. Once at least 400 people had responded to the questionnaire the data were downloaded. As with most online data collection there is no way of knowing the total number of people to whom the survey links were sent, so it is not possible to calculate a response rate.

## RESULTS

### Measurement models of the scales

Prior to beginning the factor analysis and subsequent partial correlations and SEM, the data were cleaned; the inversely worded items from the various scales were reversed, the scales were saved as separate files in SPSS and missing items were imputed, using the 'missing value analysis' feature of the programme. The percentages of missing values from each scale are as follows: Cohesion Scale (4.4%), Intention to Leave questions (1.2%), Needs Scale (1.3%), Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (1.3%), Job Satisfaction Scale (1.4%). Finally the scales were recombined into a master document and, using the data from the newly formed master document ( $n = 412$ ), each of the scales was factor analysed.

Although the scales used were previously validated (Campion et al 1993; Mobley 1977; Mowday et al 1979; Nielsen, Jex & Adams 2000; Warr et al 1979), the samples used by the original authors are likely to be somewhat different from the group of individuals who responded in the current study. Thus, it is necessary to validate these original scales for use with this new sample. This procedure described by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) who recommend the estimation and respecification of measurement models prior to

TABLE 3: BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Friendship prevalence	0.464**						
2. Satisfaction with relationships and workplace (extrinsic)	0.417**	0.293**					
3. Satisfaction with actual job performed (intrinsic)	0.334**	0.161**	0.515**				
4. Organisational commitment	0.376**	0.301**	0.636**	0.596**			
5. Social support and cooperation (cohesion)	0.500**	0.302**	0.505**	0.374**	0.394**		
6. Workload sharing (cohesion)	0.153**	0.097*	0.404**	0.222**	0.301**	0.497**	
7. Intention to leave	-0.217**	-0.101*	-0.393**	-0.467*	-0.545**	-0.184**	-0.148**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

using them in later analyses. Thus, confirmatory factor analysis was carried in AMOS (Arbuckle 1999) in order to confirm the factor structure of the measurement models used.

A two stage approach was adopted to model the data (Anderson & Gerbing 1988). First, measurement models were constructed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to obtain the best fitting set of items to represent each measure. The second stage involved the specification of the full baseline structural models.

Assessment of model fit was based on multiple criteria, reflecting statistical, theoretical and practical considerations (Byrne 2001). Pedhazur (1982) states that there have been numerous articles, both criticising existing indices and proposing new ones. Although there is little agreement about the value of various fit indices, Pedhazur claims that there does seem to be unanimity that no single fit index should be relied upon. The indices used in the current study were (a) the Chi squared ( $\chi^2$ ) likelihood ratio statistic, (b) the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) (Bentler 1990) (c) the Parsimonious Comparative Fit Index (PCFI) (Mulaik et al 1989), and (d) the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) (Browne & Cudeck 1993). Each is described below.

The  $\chi^2$  value divided by the degrees of freedom should be below five to indicate good fit (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black 1998). The CFI is a revised version of the Bentler-Bonnett (Bentler & Bonett 1980) normed fit index that adjusts for degrees of freedom. It ranges from zero to 1.00 and provides a measure of complete covariation in the data; a value > 0.90 indicates a good fit to the data (Byrne 1994, 2001). The PCFI is calibrated from the CFI; it weighs the parsimony of the model against its use of the data in achieving goodness of fit. Mulaik et al (199) state that PCFI values are often lower than what is generally considered acceptable on the basis of normed indices of fit; goodness of fit indices in the 0.90s accompanied by PCFI indices in the 0.50s are considered adequate. Byrne (2001)

maintains that the RMSEA is one of the most informative indices in SEM. The RMSEA is sensitive to the complexity of the model; values less than 0.05 indicate excellent fit, and values less than 0.08 represent a good fit.

Where the fit indices did not indicate a good fit to the model, the modification indices and expected change statistics related to the covariances for each model were inspected for evidence of misspecification. Large modification indices represent misspecified error covariances, which indicate systematic rather than random measurement error in item responses. A high degree of overlap in item content can trigger correlated errors, which occur when two items, although worded differently, ask the same question (Byrne 2001). Thus, if there was evidence that the model was misspecified, the 'problem' items (ie those that had overlapping content with other items) were first examined to ascertain if there was a substantive justification for respecification and, if there was, the items were either removed in a post hoc analysis, or respecified with the overlapping parameter being freely estimated. For example, the parameter in the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire exhibiting the highest degree of misfit represented correlated error between items 10 (*I am extremely glad that I chose this organisation to work for over others I was considering at the time*) and 15 (*Deciding to work for this organisation was a definite mistake on my part (R)*). Clearly there is a substantive rationale for allowing relationship between these two items to be freely estimated. The alpha levels and indices of fit for the measurement models used in the current study are presented in Table 4. All indices indicate good fit of the data to the models. The consistency reliability (coefficient  $\alpha$ ) of all the scales was acceptable, ranging from 0.73 (job satisfaction subscale) to 0.91 (organisational commitment questionnaire) (refer Table 4).

The OCQ had only one factor, supporting Mowday et al's (1979) original factor analysis (rotated to Kaiser varimax solution) which also resulted in a single factor solution and suggested

**TABLE 4: FIT INDICES FOR THE MEASUREMENT MODELS (*N* = 412)**

Scale	Number of factors	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	PCFI	RMSEA
Job satisfaction scale	2	2.53	0.97	0.66	0.06
Cohesion Scale	2	3.15	0.97	0.66	0.07
Organisational Commitment Questionnaire	1	2.53	0.96	0.79	0.06
Intention to Turnover	1				

Note: The measurement model for Intention to Turnover was not tested here as it has only three items and therefore zero degrees of freedom

the 15 items of the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire are relatively homogeneous with respect to the underlying attitude construct they measure. Both the cohesion scale and the satisfaction scale were found to have two distinct factors. Two factors in the satisfaction scale were, (1) satisfaction with interpersonal interactions and workplace, and (2) satisfaction with aspects of actual job performed; variety/fulfilment. The two satisfaction factors relate closely to the 'extrinsic satisfaction' and 'intrinsic satisfaction' clusters of items, identified by Warr et al (1979). The two cohesion factors were, (1) social support and cooperation and (2) workload sharing. The workload sharing factor is identical to that described by Campion et al (1993), while the remaining items loaded together as a single factor, combining Campion's 'social support' and 'communication/co-operation' factors.

### Prevalence of negative relationships

The number of negative relationships respondents reported having is presented below in Table 5. Fifty-six percent of respondents reported having at least one negative relationship.

### Relationship with organisational variables

To assess whether there were mean differences in the variables of interest in terms of the presence of negative workplace relationships, a MANOVA

was conducted using negative relationships as the independent variable and all the organisational outcome variables as dependent variables. The data were divided into those who had no negative relationships (*n* = 181) and those who had at least one (*n* = 231) to perform the MANOVA. Justification for grouping the data in this way is that (a) it is the presence of negative relationships, rather than the number of 'enemies' an individual has, that is the variable of interest in this study and (b) there are some groups with very few cases (70% of respondents have either one negative relationship or none).

The results of the MANOVA showed a statistically significant difference in terms of the presence of negative relationships on the combined dependent variables:  $F(6, 405) = 10.56$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ; Wilk's Lambda = 0.865; partial Eta squared = 0.135. To control for the increase in the family-wise Type I error, a Bonferroni correction was used, and the significance level was adjusted to  $P = 0.008$ .

Table 6 shows the *F* values, the significance levels and partial Eta squared values (a measure of effect size). There was support for hypothesis *a*; a significant difference was found between those who did and did not have at least one negative relationship at work in terms of their extrinsic  $F(1, 410) = 55.42$ ,  $P < 0.008$  and intrinsic  $F(1, 410) = 7.97$ ,  $P < 0.008$  job satisfaction scores. The partial Eta squared values indicate that the

**TABLE 5: PREVALENCE OF NEGATIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

Negative relationships	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8+
Number of respondents	181	106	54	34	10	11	3	2	11

relationship between having negative relationships is weaker for intrinsic satisfaction than extrinsic satisfaction (0.120 and 0.017 respectively), strongly supporting hypothesis *b*. It is worth noting that intrinsic job satisfaction had the weakest relationship with negative relationships, only barely achieving significance at the 0.008 level. As expected, the relationship between negative relationships and the remaining dependent variables were significant,  $P < 0.008$ , supporting hypotheses *c–e* (see Table 6). These findings indicate that those with at least one negative relationship at work are significantly less satisfied, report less organisational commitment, are part of less cohesive workgroups and are significantly more likely to be planning to leave their job. Of the variables measured, negative relationships are most strongly associated with lowered satisfaction with the work environment (extrinsic job satisfaction), and reduced organisational commitment.

## DISCUSSION

The research question asked: to what extent are negative relationships in the workplace related to job satisfaction, intention to turnover, organisational commitment and workgroup cohesion? The results supported hypotheses *a–e* and indicated that those with at least one negative relationship at work were significantly less satisfied, reported less organisational commitment, were part of less cohesive workgroups and were significantly more likely to be planning to leave their job. Further, extrinsic job satisfaction is more

closely related to the presence of negative relationships than intrinsic job satisfaction. The results also lend support to the construct validity of the measure of negative relationships created for, and used in, this study. The frequency of negative relationships (over half of the respondents in this study had at least one, and many had several) means that examining how negative relationships form, looking at the impact of negative relationships and determining how they might be managed are certainly areas that warrant attention within workplaces.

Stress is another likely outcome of negative workplace relationships. Although not directly measured in the current study this outcome bears some discussion as, in both New Zealand and Australia, there is legislation around stress in the workplace. In New Zealand the Health and Safety in Employment Amendment Act 2002 came into force on the 5 May 2003 (Amendment to the Health and Safety in Employment Act 2002). In Australia the government authorities hold that that stress is caused by work and, as such, is a management responsibility and is part of the duty of care which is fundamental to every OHS regulation. Thus, employers have a duty of care to provide a healthy and safe work environment where employees are free from harm. One purpose of the HASE Act includes confirming that harm can be caused by work-related stress. Where an employee alleges workplace bullying (an extreme form of negative workplace relationship) there may be a claim that the resulting stress is

**TABLE 6: UNIVARIATE F TESTS COMPARING RESPONDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT NEGATIVE RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK**

Dependent Variable	df	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Extrinsic job satisfaction	1	55.792	0.0000	0.120
Intrinsic job Satisfaction	1	7.278	0.0070	0.017
Organisational commitment	1	32.739	0.0000	0.074
Cohesion (social support)	1	10.633	0.0010	0.025
Cohesion (workload sharing)	1	14.416	0.0000	0.034
Intention to leave	1	8.328	0.0040	0.020

The F tests the effect of the presence of negative relationships at work. This test is based on the linearly independent pairwise comparisons among the estimated marginal means.

workplace stress and is therefore actionable under the amended HASE Act (although in the legislation there is no recognition of 'workplace bullying' *per se*). In spite of legislation such as this, which is aimed at protecting employees, it is perhaps unrealistic to think that the day to day interactions between co-workers would be impacted by government legislation. Negative relationships will still occur; however the Act may encourage employers to take an active role in intervening or managing these relationships.

Although every situation will be different, in Western cultures accepted strategies used to minimise the impact of negative relationships include engaging in open discussion of the parties' interests and synthesising multiple issues (whatever they may be) with the aim of achieving an integrative outcome (Tinsley & Brett 2001). Interestingly these authors found that managers from a collectivist culture (Hong Kong) were more likely to rely on traditionally Chinese norms of concern for collective interests and concern for authority and to involve higher management in conflict resolution. Whatever the strategy, given the current legislative framework within Australasia, the onus is on managers to engage in conflict resolution where appropriate.

As discussed previously, turnover is a particularly important area of organisational functioning that can be affected by workplace relationships. If negative relationships cause people to leave, and over half of the respondents had at least one negative relationship, the importance of these relationships should not be underestimated. Targeting interventions or resolution strategies towards workgroups or dyads where negative interactions such as concealment, manipulation, conflict, disrespect, disagreement and/or animosity are frequent may be a way to improve job satisfaction and commitment.

The findings in the current study suggest that the effect of enemies on an individual's experience of work can be profound; both in terms of their subjective sense of well-being and in terms of measurable organisational outcomes. The

results also indicated that some organisational outcomes are more strongly related to negative relationships at work than others. It is perhaps not surprising that 'extrinsic satisfaction' (employees' satisfaction with their work environment and colleagues) is more profoundly affected by enemies than satisfaction with the work itself (intrinsic satisfaction). It makes intuitive sense that the intrinsic rewards individuals get from the work they do will be relatively less impacted by poor collegial relationships, and this notion has been confirmed by the current study. Organisational commitment is variable that has a strong affective or emotional component, and commitment too, is strongly related to the presence of negative relationships at work.

### **Limitations of the study and directions for future research**

The nature of the data analysis in the current study means that causality not clear, ie are dissatisfied individuals more likely to engage in negative behaviours towards others, creating negative relationships or do negative relationships reduce job satisfaction? Perhaps many of the respondents in the current study were, themselves, engaging in negative behaviours against their colleagues! Although this question can not be answered with certainty, it seems reasonable to propose that frequently it is the negative relationship (however it has arisen) that causes dissatisfaction and intention to turnover and not the other way around. This may be a worthwhile direction for future research in this area.

The presence of negative relationships in the current study was assessed by giving respondents a definition of these relationships and asking that respondents indicate how many (if any) they had at work. To better tap into the 'negative workplace relationship' construct it would be worthwhile to develop and test a more complex scale, composed of several items based on existing definitions of negative relationships (ie concealment, manipulation, conflict, disrespect, disagreement, incivility and/or animosity).



It is worth noting that eleven respondents reported having eight or more negative relationships in the workplace. If an individual has a poor relationship with this many people at work it may indicate something about *them* rather than their colleagues or their workplace. For this reason the MANOVA described in this study was run again, removing those who reported more than seven negative relationships. The effect sizes were largely unchanged. In spite of this, it may be interesting in the future to focus on individuals who report engaging in large numbers of negative relationships with their colleagues with a view to perhaps identifying characteristics or perceptions of these individuals. In addition, the possible organisational outcomes of having these people in a workplace could be examined.

This study suggests that negative relationships in the workplace are very common, and their impact profound. Delving more deeply into how to avert the formation of negative relationships and, failing that, how to address issues arising from them would be an area which might provide strategies and interventions to reduce both their impact and frequency. The finding that intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction are differently related to negative relationships also bears further research. Although outside the scope of the current study, it may be worth investigating whether those who are very satisfied with the intrinsic aspects of their jobs (eg the 'work itself') are somewhat 'buffered' and therefore less impacted by the presence of a negative relationship or negative interactions in the workplace.

The impact of negative relationships on performance or productivity was not directly addressed. Although there is little research to date looking at the effects of negative relationships on productivity or performance it seems likely that they would interfere with co-operation and communication in work groups, and direct attention and energy away from the task at hand. The fact that Campion et al (1993) found that a composite of the cohesion items used in the current study predicted both productivity and manager

judgements of effectiveness, and that negative relationships are associated with lower cohesion scores, does suggest that negative relationships will indeed have a negative impact on performance at work. This is also an area that warrants further investigation.

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