Getting New Staff to Stay: The Mediating Role of Organizational Identification

Laura G. E. Smith, Catherine E. Amiot, Victor J. Callan, Deborah J. Terry and Joanne R. Smith

School of Business, University of Queensland, St Lucia, QLD 4072, Australia, Université du Québec à Montréal, Département de Psychologie, CP 8888, Succ. Centre-Ville, Montréal, PQ, Canada H3C 3P8, and School of Psychology, Washington Singer Laboratories, University of Exeter, Exeter EX4 4QG, UK

Corresponding author email: l.smith@business.uq.edu.au

Newcomer turnover is a major cost to organizations, and the quality of new employees’ experiences in the first few months is critical in determining whether they decide to stay or leave. In a study that focused on the first stage of newcomer socialization, we investigate the impact of perceptions of social validation from the team and the team leader, and perceived fairness of treatment on newcomers’ identification with their work team and the organization, specifically measuring the group self-investment components of identification. The mediating role of these levels of group self-investment and of the imbalance (i.e. difference) between levels of self-investment on turnover intentions was also tested. New staff (N = 569) joining a large public-sector organization completed a questionnaire about their socialization experiences in their first 6 months of their employment. Structural equation modelling revealed that social validation by the team and team leaders, and fairness of treatment, predict increased investment with the organization and with the team. Organizational-level self-investment and an imbalance in favour of investment with the organization over that of the team mediated decreases in turnover intentions. We conclude that organizations should provide newcomers with validation that promotes identification with their organization during this critical stage of socialization.

In the first few months of employment, what makes one new employee want to remain with an organization and another to resign? Dating back to the early 1970s, researchers have found that, when an individual identifies with a social group, they become more committed to the group and they are less likely to leave of their own volition (e.g. Ashforth and Mael, 1989; van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000; Riketta and van Dick, 2005; van Vugt and Hart, 2004). However, research is yet to identify the psychological processes that lead an individual to identify with their new organization in these early stages of their employment, and so makes them more committed to stay. Moreover, untangling these psychological processes is complicated by evidence that employees display multiple levels of identification, e.g. with their work team and with their organization (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008). Furthermore, identification is a multidimensional construct with several subcomponents, some of which may be more significant to newcomer identity development than others (e.g. Leach et al., 2008).

Recently, the British Journal of Management called for a more integrated understanding of social and organizational identity (Cornelissen, Haslam and Balmer, 2007), and has published studies into, for example, identity matching (Ullrich et al., 2007) and nested identities and motivation (Riketta and Nienaber, 2007). Despite these theoretical advances, there is a lack of empirical data on (a) the social-psychological perceptions that facilitate individuals’ identification concurrently at different levels (e.g. with their work team and their organization), (b) the impact of an imbalance between identification at these
levels on employee commitment, and (c) which subcomponent(s) of identification are most important in predicting this continued commitment.

For organizations, it is important to understand the factors that shape employee commitment given the considerable financial, social and productivity costs associated with the high turnover of newcomers (e.g. Abelson and Baysinger, 1984; Dess and Shaw, 2001). A new employee’s first 3–6 months is generally considered the highest period of risk in terms of turnover. Up to half of staff turnover occurs within the first 6 months of employment. The costs of turnover range from 1/2 to 5 times an employee’s annual wages depending upon the position. Severance pay is also a major cost especially among more highly skilled employees and middle to executive management. In addition, turnover impacts upon sales, performance and profit (Kacmar et al., 2006).

The socialization programmes used by organizations are often centralized (e.g. Allen, 2006; Ashforth and Saks, 1996; Morrison, 1993), and therefore we know relatively little about the role of the day-to-day interactions of new employees with their existing teams and team leaders in building the commitment to stay. Focusing on the factors that can promote the development of identification at the more local level will provide insight into practical solutions that employers can use at this level to ease the transition phase for both the organization and new employees. In particular, we examine the role of two key factors stemming from this local level: perceptions of social validation and fairness of treatment. We argue that these two fundamental social-psychological factors help to attach a newcomer to an organization because they provide newcomers with the vital cues from their co-workers that they are normative, respected and accepted ingroup members (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008; Festinger, 1950, 1954; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Restubog et al., 2008; Tyler and Blader, 2000; Walumba, Cropanzano and Hartnell, 2009).

While fairness of treatment is a well-established variable in studies of employee retention (Walumba, Cropanzano and Hartnell, 2009), the role of social validation either by work team members or the team leader are less well understood conceptually or tested empirically. We propose that the levels of identification in turn mediate the relationship between social validation, fairness and reduced turnover intentions. In particular, a conceptual development from this research is that sense-giving through social validation contributes to the development of identity (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008; Weick, 1995). In the following sections, we articulate more fully the guiding conceptual framework and hypotheses (see Figure 1).

Integrating social and organizational identity

The role of social identity

Recent discussions have called for a more integrated approach to the study of social and organizational identity (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008; Cornelissen, Haslam and Balmer, 2007), including the processes by which identities
at different levels of abstraction relate to each other (Riketta and Nienaber, 2007; Sluss and Ashforth, 2008). According to social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), identification is a multidimensional, psychological connection to a group with both emotional and cognitive significance (Cameron, 2004; Ellemers, Kortekaas and Ouwerkerk, 1999; Leach et al., 2008). The emotional aspect of identification is labelled ‘group-level self-investment’ and the cognitive component is ‘group-level self-definition’. Once an individual becomes identified with a group, he or she may also develop a commitment to the group and internalize its goals, culture, norms and values. If a particular social identity is salient to individuals, they interpret and react to social stimuli in terms of that identity (Turner et al., 1987).

Group-level self-investment, as the more affective dimension of identification, has been especially related to maintaining a positive evaluation of the ingroup (for a review, see Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). Previous authors have suggested that this may be of primary importance in determining the strategies a newcomer uses to maintain a positive self-image, e.g. by remaining with or leaving their group (Cameron, 2004; Leach et al., 2008). Therefore, in the current research we focused on the group-level self-investment sub-components of identification.

The development of identification

Newcomers are unlikely to begin their jobs with a fully developed sense of identification with their new organization (see Amiot et al., 2007). In a recent conceptual framework, Amiot et al. (2007) propose that newcomers experience social identity development as a series of distinct phases over time. New identities are integrated into the self-concept and organized within the global self-structure (Amiot et al., 2007). As employees experience these phases, they will react to the new organization in specific ways. Once the new work identity is fully integrated into the self, this identity contributes to the individual’s sense of self, independent of the social context. This framework highlights the significance of the initial stages of socialization, in line with evidence of high levels of turnover among new staff at this stage. Employees in the first 6 months are at a period in the socialization process described in the Amiot et al. (2007) framework as between the ‘categorization’ and ‘compartmentalization’ stages of identity integration. Newcomers may still identify with their previous organization, but are beginning to recognize their new organizational identity. They are yet to fully integrate the new identity into the self. Individuals are in the process of gathering information about their status in their new ingroup. Therefore, social feedback from existing ingroup members in the forms of fair treatment and social validation are particularly important at this stage of socialization in promoting newcomers’ development of group-level self-investment and feelings of acceptance.

In order to understand the process by which newcomers ‘learn the ropes’ at this first stage of socialization (e.g. Jokisaari and Nurmi, 2009) and ‘make the transition from being organizational outsiders to being insiders’ (Bauer et al., 2007; for reviews see for example Ashforth, Sluss and Harrison, 2007; Bauer and Taylor, 2001; Wanous and Colella, 1989), theorists generally focus on the ways in which organizations facilitate socialization (e.g. by socialization tactics) and/or ways in which individuals master their role (e.g. Allen, 2006; Ashforth and Saks, 1996; Morrison, 1993). This focus neglects the social-psychological processes that occur concurrently, including the possibility that if an individual builds self-investment with their organization this provides the psychological ‘glue’ (van Vugt and Hart, 2004) that could bind together the socialization processes and tactics described above.

In addition, researchers have focused on the judgements of individual newcomers about the organization’s relative distinctiveness or his or her personal reasons for becoming attached to their organization (e.g. Eisenbeiss and Otten, 2008; for a review see Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008). However, this focus promotes an under-emphasis on the more informal process of building identities through, for example, social feedback from group members (cf. Postmes, Haslam and Swaab, 2005).

The role of social validation in increasing newcomer group-level self-investment

The successful adaptation of newcomers in a work environment depends partly on them mastering their role (e.g. Ashforth and Saks, 1996). This mastery is aided by positive and reinforcing feedback from both co-workers and more senior
colleagues about the appropriateness or ‘validity’ of their workplace actions (Ibarra, 1999). From a social identity perspective, there are many reasons why we might expect that positive and validating feedback from leaders can shape newcomers’ group-level self-investment. For example, leaders are more effective in engendering followership when they affirm a salient identity (Haslam and Platow, 2001). Vertical communication of this kind has been shown to predict organizational identification (Bartels et al., 2010). Providing clear feedback directly informs which norms are salient for an organization and work team, and what an employee should do to follow these norms and be recognized as an ingroup member (cf. Smith and Louis, 2008).

Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) argue that this affirming feedback or social validation (cf. Festinger, 1950, 1954) may be the underlying mechanism of a ‘sense-giving’ process through which co-workers guide newcomers’ understanding of their preferred organizational reality (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). If a co-worker indicates that a newcomer is doing the job correctly and appropriately, this feedback gives the newcomer a cue that their behaviour is normative for their organization or their work team. Social validation provides an ‘identity echo’ that reinforces desirable identity attributes (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008). Unlike social support, social validation provides concrete and immediate information about the accuracy of the appropriateness of particular behaviours with regard to specific group norms and group standards.

In this way, sense-giving through social validation contributes to the development of identity (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008; Pratt, 2001; Weick, 1995). This process is represented in our model (Figure 1), whereby social validation serves as an indirect cause of a reduction in turnover intentions, exerting its influence by increasing team- and organizational-level self-investment. Social validation enables a newcomer to evaluate the quality of his or her work relative to the expectations of co-workers, and the extent to which his or her colleagues view the work, and therefore his or her candidacy for ingroup membership, positively. This social validation increases new employees’ confidence that they are doing their job correctly (cf. McGarty et al., 1993) and are being accepted into the group by their peers. Therefore, social validation provides not only explicit feedback about the quality of their work that should enable individuals to learn their new role, but also implicit positive feedback about his or her acceptance as a new group member by existing group members. This perception of acceptance leads to a positive emotional attachment to the organization. In turn, this positive emotional attachment, via increasing group-level self-investment, may increase the newcomer’s loyalty to the organization (van Vugt and Hart, 2004).

Importantly, social validation by work colleagues at the same level of seniority, for example by the local work team, is more likely to aid the development of team-level self-investment than self-investment at higher levels of abstraction. This is because team members represent the norms and values of their own specific group, rather than the more diffuse values and norms of the organization as a whole. We propose that the validation provided by different groups and leaders predicts the associated levels of group self-investment (similar to the ‘identity-matching’ principle; Ullrich et al., 2007). In other words, newcomers may develop a sense of identification or self-investment at the specific level from which they received validation (Sluss and Ashforth, 2008). Validation by work team peers may increase their level of team-level self-investment, but not organizational-level self-investment. Conversely, the team leader may be perceived as a team ingroup member, but also as a representative of the more superordinate organizational identity. Therefore, social validation from a team leader may increase organizational-level self-investment and also team-level self-investment. The above rationale led to our first hypothesis, with the caveat that the different levels of identification are related to each other, and therefore group self-investment fostered by validation at one level may ‘spill over’ from one level to another.

\[ \text{H1: (a) Social validation by the team will be positively associated with team-level self-investment, and (b) social validation by the team leader will be positively associated with both organizational-level self-investment and team-level self-investment.} \]

The role of fair treatment in increasing group-level self-investment

Fairness of treatment is conceptualized in the literature as a relational subcomponent of
procedural justice (Tyler and Blader, 2003). Akin to the way that social validation provides information about the content of the identity, fair treatment provides cues to the newcomer about the nature of the new group, and about the relationship between the organization and the employee. It conveys to individuals that they are valued and respected within their group (Restubog et al., 2008). Fairness is a cue to the newcomer that the organization is a desirable group with which to psychologically invest. This argument is supported by evidence that there is a positive relationship between procedural justice and organizational identification (Tyler and Blader, 2000; Walumba, Cropanzano and Hartnell, 2009). On the other hand, unfair treatment leads individuals to distrust the organization and to dis-identify with the group (Restubog et al., 2008).

The group engagement model by Tyler and Blader (2003) (and Blader and Tyler, 2009) proposes that perceptions of procedural justice increase pride, respect, identification and organizational citizenship behaviours. As policies and procedures are set by the organization, perceptions about such policies and procedures would reflect on attachment to the organization rather than a different level of group self-investment. This led to our second and third hypotheses:

\[ H2: \text{Fairness of treatment within the organization will positively predict organizational-level self-investment.} \]

Furthermore, in line with the group engagement model and the identification literature, our third hypothesis was as follows:

\[ H3: \text{Self-investment with the team and organization would (a) be negatively associated with turnover intentions and (b) mediate the effect of social validation and fairness of treatment on turnover intentions.} \]

**Balancing levels of identification**

As proposed in Figure 1, group-level self-investment is influenced by social-psychological cues such as validation and fair treatment. However, these antecedents are related to specific levels of group self-investment. We also need to consider how these antecedents predict specific levels of self-investment and the interplay between these levels on turnover intentions. Within an organization, individuals can identify with multiple groups, and group identities are often nested within each other (Riketta and Nienaber, 2007). Research reveals that outcomes (e.g. turnover) for each group are predicted by identification with the group that is the most relevant and salient (Ellemers and Rink, 2005; Ullrich et al., 2007). For example, an employee who perceives that he or she is treated fairly by his or her work team, but not by the organization as a whole, may identify only with the work team and not with the organization. This imbalance in favour of work team identification over organizational identification may mean that he or she is less committed to remain with the organization.

Yet these levels of identification are unlikely to be mutually exclusive. Identifying with interrelated groups may develop in the process of identifying with others, such that identification with smaller groups generalizes to larger groups (Amiot et al., 2007). For example, in an organization employees may identify with their team, with their managers, and their department or division. The process of identifying with each of these nested subgroups may impact on identification with the superordinate category (i.e. the entire organization; Riketta and Nienaber, 2007). It is possible that identifying with multiple identities that are nested within each other, such as one’s work team and organization, contributes to an employee’s well-being and willingness to stay with the organization. Indeed, evidence in other domains suggests that identification with multiple groups (rather than just one) during times of transition can lead to more positive outcomes (e.g. Amiot et al., 2007; Haslam et al., 2008; Iyer et al., 2009; Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006).

We propose that a lack of balance between identities, or more specifically self-investment (e.g. becoming invested at one level but not with the other nested level), could be associated with greater turnover intentions. This may lead to the newcomer being unsure of the true nature and the global values of the organization or being ambiguous about how he or she feels about working for the organization. This lack of congruence (Sheldon and Niemec, 2006) between the local environment (i.e. the team) and the superordinate environment (i.e. the organization) may be stressful and confronting, and increase the level of psychological.
risk to the newcomer (Harter et al., 1997) and his or her intentions to leave.

While identity imbalance may increase turnover intentions through increasing cognitive dissonance (cf. Festinger, 1957), and/or identity conflict (e.g. Harter, 1999), the degree of imbalance per se may be less important in predicting turnover intentions than the direction or exact location of imbalance. Becoming invested more at the superordinate organizational level than at the team level could buffer against the impact of more proximal changes on turnover intentions (e.g. changes in the work team; Jetten, O’Brien and Trindall, 2002). In the context of joining a new organization, it could be particularly important to develop self-investment with the organization as this is a more stable and continuous basis for identification compared with the work team. Both identifications are useful at their own levels: as a more proximal ingroup, the work team provides more opportunity for forming bonds between team members and concrete guidelines for work behaviour, whereas organizational identification provides broader goals and more continuity over time (see Sani, Bowe and Herrera, 2008). In this way, organizational-level self-investment could be used as an identity ‘anchor’ if changes take place at the work team level or if the employee is reassigned to another team.

In other words, investing more with a larger, superordinate group (e.g. the organization) and having one’s levels of self-investment imbalanced in favour of this group could buffer a lesser investment with a smaller, nested group (e.g. the work team). However, investing more with the work team rather than with the organization may not be sufficient to buffer the impact of disinvestment with the organization on turnover intentions. Therefore, we suggest that different ‘types’ of identity imbalance are likely to have different effects on turnover intentions. The exact location of the imbalance may be more important than the extent to which there is imbalance per se. Accordingly, we hypothesized that:

\[H4: \text{ (a) Greater group self-investment with the organization than with the work team would be negatively associated with turnover intentions, and (b) identity imbalance in favour of organizational-level self-investment over team-level self-investment would mediate the effect of social validation and fairness of treatment on turnover intentions.}\]
opportunity to clearly contextualize their role within the organization, and for the organization to promote its values and short- and longer-term goals.

**Method**

**Participants**

Overall, 569 new staff members from the organization volunteered to participate in this research. Over a 12-month period, all staff who joined the organization were invited to complete the online questionnaire within the first 6 months of their permanent employment. Participants were recruited by asking for volunteers via email across the whole organization and through approaches at all corporate inductions. Data were collected across all departments of the organization and at all levels of seniority.

Initial analysis of the sample revealed that 88 participants reported their tenure as greater than 6 months at the time of completing the survey, and therefore their data were removed. A missing value analysis indicated that a further ten participants’ responses contained more than 5% missing data and therefore were not included in analyses. The mean age of the remaining 471 participants was 35.11 years (SD = 11.76), ranging from 17 to 68 years, including 200 females and 266 males (five did not report their gender). Their average tenure was 2.56 months (SD = 1.68), ranging from 0.25 to 6 months. The associations observed in the models did not vary as a function of the time the employees had been in the organization. The sample contained both non-office-based staff (N = 193) and office-based staff (N = 278). All divisions of the organization were represented, and all participants had attended an induction.

**Measures**

Participants completed a structured online questionnaire containing standardized scales. The
Figure 3. Structural relationships in the indirect effects model with team leader validation, model 2

Figure 4. Structural relationships in the indirect effects model predicting turnover intentions through identity imbalance, model 3
questionnaire measured perceptions of social validation by the team and team leader, fairness of treatment, identification with the team and organization, and turnover intentions. Details about these measures are now provided.

**Social validation.** A six-item scale ($\alpha = 0.93$; adapted from Smith and Postmes, in press) measured the extent to which participants felt socially validated by their team members. These items were aggregated into two parcels. Parcel 1 (three items, $\alpha = 0.87$) included the items, ‘My team makes me feel that my opinions about the correct way to do my job are valid’, ‘My team makes me feel that my beliefs about appropriate behaviour at work are justified’ and ‘My team makes me feel that I conduct myself appropriately at work’; parcel 2 (three items, $\alpha = 0.87$) included the items, ‘My team makes me feel certain that my views on how to do my role are right’, ‘My team gives me confidence that I am doing my role well’ and ‘I feel that my opinions about work are shared by my team’. An identical six-item scale ($\alpha = 0.94$) was adapted to measure perceived social validation by the person to whom the new staff member reported directly (e.g. team leader; this construct is hereafter referred to as team leader social validation; parcel 1, $\alpha = 0.89$; parcel 2, $\alpha = 0.92$). On all of the above and subsequent items, participants responded on a scale of 1 (‘strongly agree’) to 7 (‘strongly disagree’).

**Fairness of treatment.** A ten-item subscale from Tyler and Blader’s (2003) four-component model of procedural justice ($\alpha = 0.95$) was used to measure fairness of treatment. These items were aggregated into three parcels, as follows: parcel 1 (three items, $\alpha = 0.87$), ‘The rules lead to fair treatment when decisions are being implemented’, ‘The rules require that I get an honest explanation for how decisions are made’, ‘My views are considered when rules are being applied’; parcel 2 (three items, $\alpha = 0.88$), ‘The rules ensure that my needs will be taken into account’, ‘The rules respect my rights as an employee’, ‘The rules respect my rights as a person’; and parcel 3 (four items, $\alpha = 0.92$), ‘I trust the organization to do what is best for me’, ‘The organization really cares about my well-being’, ‘My organization cares about my satisfaction’, ‘The organization follows through on the promises it makes’.

**Identification: team-level self-investment.** A ten-item scale ($\alpha = 0.93$) adapted from Leach et al.
(2008) measured the extent to which participants identified with their work team. Within this overall measure, three subscales measured distinct aspects of group-level self-investment. The scales were satisfaction (four items, \( \alpha = 0.92 \)), ‘I am glad to be in a group with my work team’, ‘I think my work team has a lot to be proud of’, ‘It is pleasant to be in a group with my work team’ and ‘Being in a group with my work team gives me a good feeling’; solidarity (three items, \( \alpha = 0.79 \)), ‘I feel a bond with my work team’, ‘I feel solidarity with my work team’, ‘I feel committed to my work team’; and centrality (three items, \( \alpha = 0.88 \)), ‘I often think about the fact that I am in a group with my work team’, ‘The fact that I am in a group with my work team is an important part of who I am’ and ‘Being in a group with my work team is an important part of my identity’.

Identification: organizational-level self-investment. An equivalent ten-item scale to the team identification scale measured the extent to which participants identified with the organization (overall \( \alpha = 0.93 \)). Items measured three aspects of self-investment with the organization, comprising satisfaction (four items, \( \alpha = 0.94 \)), solidarity (three items, \( \alpha = 0.85 \)) and centrality (three items, \( \alpha = 0.90 \)).

Identity imbalance. To assess the degree of imbalance (cf. Sheldon and Niemiec, 2006) between the levels of identification, a difference score was computed by subtracting each team-level self-investment subscale from each equivalent organizational-level self-investment subscale. On the seven-point scale, the imbalance score could range from \(-6\) (indicating maximum investment with the team over the organization) to \(+6\) (maximum investment with the organization over the team). A zero score represented perfect balance between the two levels of self-investment. This measure of imbalance enabled us to ascertain the most prevalent direction of imbalance (or the presence of identity balance) and allowed us to examine whether one direction of imbalance was more predictive of turnover intentions than the other.

Turnover intentions. A three-item scale (\( \alpha = 0.73 \)) was adapted from Bozeman and Perrewe (2001) to measure intentions to leave the organization: ‘I will probably look for a new job in the near future’, ‘It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave this organization’ and ‘There’s not much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely’.

Analytical strategy

Parcelling of items. When the number of items included in a full model is high, this can cause a sub-optimal variable to sample size ratio and less stable parameter estimates (Bagozzi and Heatherton, 1994). Using parcels enabled us to avoid under-identification of the model (Little et al., 2002) and created more parsimonious models with less various sources of systematic measurement or sampling error (Bandalos, 2002; Little et al., 2002). Therefore, scale items were aggregated into two or more parcels for the validation and fairness constructs. Parcels were constructed using an internal consistency approach (Kishton and Widaman, 1994), whereby each parcel had a Cronbach alpha score of more than 0.50 and items within the parcel loaded onto only one factor. Using this approach, items were randomly assigned to parcels and each parcel passed a minimum standard of reliability and indication of unidimensionality, according to recommendations for parcelling standards by Kishton and Widaman (1994). These distinct parcels were used as observed variables of the latent constructs in the models.

Preliminary analyses. Prior to the main analyses, the variables were examined for missing values, outliers and meeting the assumptions of multivariate analysis (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Missing values (representing less than 3% of the sample on each measure) were estimated and replaced using an expectation-maximization method. Preliminary regression analyses were then conducted to assess the relative importance of the identification subscales in predicting turnover intentions. These preliminary analyses informed the choice of which subscales to include in the full structural equation models.

Main analyses. Model fit was tested using structural equation modelling (SEM). All model estimations were conducted using the maximum likelihood procedure in AMOS v. 17.0 (Byrne, 2001). We assessed the model’s goodness of fit by
using the chi-squared ratio, the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) (Tanaka and Huba, 1989), the comparative fit index (CFI) (Bentler, 1990), the absolute fit index (ABI) (McDonald and Marsh, 1990), the normed fit index (NFI) (Bentler and Bonett, 1980) the incremental fit index (IFI) (Bollen, 1986), the standardized root mean residual (SRMR) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Browne and Cudeck, 1993). Chi-squared should ideally be non-significant, whereby the observed data are not significantly different to the expected data based on the model specifications. The CFI gives an estimation of the fit of the hypothesized model relative to the null model (where the null model assumes zero population covariance among the observed variables; Kline, 2005). The GFI is analogous to R² in multiple regression, and calculates a weighted proportion of variance in the sample covariance accounted for by the estimated population covariance matrix (Tanaka and Huba, 1989). Fit indices greater than 0.95 are often taken as indicative of good-fitting models (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The SRMR is the average difference between the sample variances and covariances, and the estimated population variances and covariances; values below 0.08 are desirable (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The RMSEA estimates the lack of fit in a model compared to a saturated model; values of 0.06 or less indicate a good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

To test for the mediating roles of organizational satisfaction, team satisfaction and identity imbalance in the associations between the antecedents and turnover intentions, two series of analyses were conducted for each model. First, using the unbiased estimates of mediation effects provided by SEM, we calculated the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals in AMOS 17.0 (for details of this bootstrapping procedure see Cheung and Lau, 2008). Evidence suggests that this is a robust method of testing for mediation and it enabled us to test the significance of the indirect effects (MacKinnon, Lockwood and Williams, 2004; MacKinnon, Warsi and Dwyer, 1995; MacKinnon et al., 2002). Second, we compared models that included the direct paths with models in which these direct paths were not included (Byrne, 2001). This enabled us to determine whether the indirect models or the direct models were a more appropriate fit for the data.

**Results**

**Preliminary analyses**

Table 1 presents the correlations among the latent variables included in the SEM, as well as the means and standard deviations. A high zero-order correlation between validation by the team and the team leader, \( r(471) = 0.74, p < 0.001 \), suggested that these variables may be multicollinear. Collinearity diagnostics indicated that the condition index of one dimension was 16.57, and this dimension contributed strongly to the variance of both team and team leader validation (0.97 and 0.69, respectively; see Belsley, Kuh and Welsch, 1980). In order to avoid statistical instability in the parameter estimates, team and team leader levels of validation were investigated in separate models in subsequent SEM analyses.¹

### Regression of identification subcomponents on turnover intentions

Regression analyses investigated the impact of the subcomponents of team-level and organizational-level self-investment on turnover intentions. As we were interested in testing how each level of self-investment predicts turnover intentions, the team-level and organizational-level self-investment subscales were entered in step 1 and step 2 respectively of the regression analysis. This enabled us to ascertain the proportion of the variance in turnover intentions explained by each level of self-investment. Table 2 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients (\( b \)), the standard error (\( SE \)), the standardized regression coefficients (\( \beta \)), R², adjusted R² and the change in R².

¹In view of the high intercorrelation between the team validation and team leader validation scales, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to empirically ascertain whether these can be considered separate variables or should be treated as a single factor in further modelling. The CFA confirmed a significant improvement in model fit when the constructs were treated as separate scales, measuring team and team leader validation respectively, rather than as a single construct, \( \Delta \chi^2(2) = 667.77, p < 0.001 \). A hierarchical regression analysis predicting turnover intentions, including team validation at step 1 and team leader validation at step 2, suggested that both team validation (\( \Delta R^2 = 0.03, F(1, 444) = 15.10, p < 0.001 \)) and team leader validation (\( \Delta R^2 = 0.04, F(1, 443) = 20.56, p < 0.001 \)) explained a significant amount of unique variance in turnover intentions.
In step 1, the three subcomponents of team-level self-investment contributed 0.06% (0.05% adjusted) in the variability in turnover intentions. Team satisfaction was the only significant predictor of turnover intentions, $\beta = -0.25$, $p = 0.001$, as neither team centrality, $\beta = 0.08$, $p = 0.14$, nor team solidarity, $\beta = -0.03$, $p = 0.68$, were associated significantly with turnover intentions. At step 2, the three subcomponents of organizational-level self-investment explained an additional 23% of the variance in turnover intentions, $\Delta R^2 = 0.23$, $p<0.001$. Although the bivariate correlations between the subcomponents of organizational-level self-investment and turnover intentions were statistically different from zero, neither organizational solidarity, $\beta = -0.003$, $p = 0.97$, nor organizational centrality, $\beta = 0.04$, $p = 0.56$, contributed significantly to the regression analysis. The relationship between organizational-level self-investment and turnover intentions was driven by the satisfaction subcomponent, which had a significant effect, $\beta = -0.55$, $p<0.001$. Accordingly, only the team-level and organizational-level satisfaction subcomponents of identification were included in the SEM analyses.

**Main analyses**

Tests of the hypothesized theoretical model. To investigate the factors associated with increased turnover intentions, the theoretical model presented in Figure 1 was tested over four structural equation models using AMOS 17.0. Team and team leader social validation were entered into separate models in order to avoid statistical instability caused by their multicollinearity.

In order to test Hypotheses 1–3, we analysed a model that contained team social validation and both levels of group satisfaction (model 1; Figure 2).² Fit indices for this model were

²To address the issue of directionality between variables, we tested two alternative reverse-causation models in which turnover intentions predicted perceptions of fair treatment and team validation or team leader validation,
relatively good ($\chi^2(97) = 228.55$, $p<0.001$, GFI = 0.94, NFI = 96, CFI = 0.98, IFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.05). The equivalent model that included team leader social validation instead of team validation (model 2; Figure 3) had a slightly better fit ($\chi^2(97) = 210.10$, $p<0.001$, GFI = 0.95, NFI = 96, CFI = 0.98, IFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.05). Exchanging team validation for team leader validation represented a significant improvement in model fit, $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 17.34$, $p<0.01$.

To test Hypothesis 4, model 3 (Figure 4) investigated the effect of team social validation and fairness on identity imbalance, and the mediating effect of identity imbalance on turnover intentions.\(^3\) This model had satisfactory fit ($\chi^2(24) = 98.26$, $p<0.001$, GFI = 0.96, NFI = 96, CFI = 0.97, IFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.11). A fourth model (Figure 5) replaced team social validation with team leader social validation. This model also fit the data well ($\chi^2(24) = 96.26$, $p<0.001$, GFI = 0.96, NFI = 96, CFI = 0.97, IFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.12), representing a non-significant increase in fit when team leader validation was included rather than team validation, $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 2.00$, $p = 0.20$.

Tests of indirect effects. As the path between organizational satisfaction and turnover intentions was significant in models 1 and 2, it appeared that organizational satisfaction may mediate the association between social validation and fairness and turnover intentions. Therefore, for each indirect model we calculated the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals in AMOS 17.0 (Table 3) and compared the direct and indirect models to determine which was the most appropriate for the data.

Results indicated that both team and team leader validation, and fairness of treatment, had a significant negative indirect effect on turnover intentions in these models. Together, these results confirm the mediating role of organizational satisfaction in the association between social validation and turnover intentions, and between fairness and turnover intentions. This procedure was also followed to test the indirect effect of validation and fairness on turnover intentions through identity imbalance (models 3 and 4). Results suggested that identity imbalance had a significant mediating effect on turnover intentions (Table 3).

Next, we compared models that included the direct paths with models in which these direct paths were not included (Byrne, 2001). We compared model 1 that included the direct links between fairness and turnover intentions and between team validation and turnover intentions ($\chi^2(95) = 228.20$, $p<0.001$, GFI = 0.94, NFI = 96, CFI = 0.98, IFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.05) with model 1 without these two direct links. The difference in fit between these models was not significant, $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 0.35$, $p>0.05$. Model 2 was then tested with the direct links included ($\chi^2(95) = 210.10$, $p<0.001$, GFI = 0.95, NFI = 96, CFI = 0.98, IFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.05). Again, the difference in fit between the models with and without the direct links was not significant, $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 0.001$, $p>0.05$. Therefore, the addition of these two direct links did not improve the fit of either model 1 or model 2, and the indirect paths remained significant to $p = 0.001$. As the direct paths in both models were non-significant, and the indirect models were more parsimonious and fit the data equally well, the direct paths were not included in the final models.

Addition of the direct paths in model 3 yielded adequate fit indices ($\chi^2(22) = 45.98$, $p<0.001$, GFI = 0.98, NFI = 98, CFI = 0.99, IFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.03) and significantly

\(^3\)Additional models were tested to assess whether the relationships in models 3 and 4 remained significant when the variables measuring organizational-level and team-level satisfaction were also included in the models alongside the identity imbalance variable. These models had satisfactory fit (model 3’s fit becoming $\chi^2(110) = 336.62$, $p<0.001$; GFI = 0.92, NFI = 95, CFI = 0.96, IFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.06 upon inclusion of the satisfaction scales; and model 4’s fit becoming $\chi^2(110) = 319.51$, $p<0.001$; GFI = 0.93, NFI = 95, CFI = 0.96, IFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.06). The paths between social validation and identity imbalance and between fairness of treatment and identity imbalance remained significant in both models. However, as the identity imbalance and satisfaction variables partly contain the same scale items, they are likely to be multicollinear and this may cause statistical instability in the parameter estimates if included in the same models. Therefore, we report them in separate models.
improved the fit of the model according to the chi-squared index $\Delta \chi^2(2) = 28.81$, $p<0.001$ (which would be expected upon the addition of two parameters). With the inclusion of these direct paths the association between identity imbalance and turnover intentions remained highly significant (increasing from $\beta = -0.31$, $p = 0.001$ to $\beta = -0.38$, $p<0.001$). This suggests that in addition to any direct effect that team validation had on turnover intentions, there was also a significant indirect effect through identity imbalance. A similar result was achieved for model 4 ($\Delta \chi^2(2) = 51.51$, $p<0.001$; $\chi^2(22) = 45.46$, $p<0.001$, GFI = 0.98, NFI = 98, CFI = 0.99, IFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.05). Upon inclusion of the direct paths in model 4, the path between identity imbalance and turnover intentions was modified by only 0.01 (from $\beta = -0.31$ to $\beta = -0.30$, $p<0.001$). This minimal change in the coefficients in models 3 and 4 suggests that identity imbalance mediated the relationship between the predictor variables and turnover intentions.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this research was to investigate factors that predicted turnover intentions in people who are new to an organization. We argued that the social validation that newcomers receive from their team and team leader, situated within a fair and respectful organizational context, would be positively associated with the extent to which they self-invest (identify) with their team and organization. We argued that, in turn, this group-level self-investment would negatively predict newcomers’ intentions of resigning from the organization. Furthermore, we investigated the importance of the parallel influence of different levels of self-investment and the interplay between these levels. We proposed that investing at one nested level (the work team) but not at the superordinate level (the organization) could increase the individuals’ intentions to leave.

In line with Hypothesis 1, team leader validation positively predicted both team satisfaction and organizational satisfaction. It appears that team leaders can simultaneously be a representative of the local team and be a representative of the organization, and therefore validation from team leaders can help newcomers invest at both levels. Interestingly, validation from the team also positively predicted satisfaction at both levels, and therefore validation from the team and the team leader were also both significantly and negatively associated with identity imbalance. As others have found (Tyler and Blader, 2000; Walumba, Cropanzano and Hartnell, 2009), in support of Hypothesis 2 fairness of treatment also significantly and positively predicted organizational satisfaction (but not team satisfaction) and therefore it predicted an imbalance between the identities in favour of organizational-level self-investment.

Overall, the above findings suggest that the combination of social cues that newcomers
receive through perceptions of social validation and fair treatment may contribute to their self-investment with the team and organization. This implies that positive and validating feedback from co-workers and the demonstration of respect and fair treatment in the workplace are important aspects of the socialization process.

We found partial support for Hypothesis 3: satisfaction (as a subcomponent of identification) with the organization, but not the team, was negatively associated with turnover intentions. Furthermore, organizational satisfaction fully mediated the relationships between validation and turnover intentions and between fairness of treatment and turnover intentions. In turn, employee levels of organizational satisfaction negatively predicted their intentions to leave the organization. This finding suggests that validation and fairness may reduce turnover intentions by promoting satisfaction with being a member of the organization. These social-psychological factors are negatively associated with turnover intentions through being positively associated with organizational satisfaction during this early phase of newcomer socialization. This result highlights the importance of organizational identity in providing the psychological glue which increases individuals’ commitment to their organization4 (cf. van Vugt and Hart, 2004).

In accordance with Hypothesis 4, an imbalance between levels of group self-investment in favour of the organizational level was positively associated with intentions to stay in the organization. Identity imbalance in this direction predicted decreased turnover intentions, and also mediated the effect of validation and fairness on turnover intentions. We suggest that feeling invested more with the organization as a whole than with the team may provide a more general vision of the work environment as well as a psychological safety-net against the impact of more proximal changes on turnover intentions (e.g. Jetten, O’Brien and Trindall, 2002). Previous research has shown the strong effect of organizational attachment on turnover (Riketta and van Dick, 2005). This result suggests that the direction of imbalance between the levels of group self-investment could be more important than the existence of imbalance per se.

Interestingly, in the present study we found that only the satisfaction subcomponent of group-level self-investment was significantly associated with turnover intentions. This suggests that the positive emotional satisfaction experienced by our participants was more important in predicting turnover intentions in the newcomer context than the ‘colder’ more cognitive dimensions of self-investment. This is congruent with previous authors’ suggestions that affect may be of primary importance in determining whether a new group member remains with or leaves their group (Cameron, 2004; Leach et al., 2008).

Implications

Our research provides evidence for the factors which aid the development of newcomers’ self-investment with an organization at different levels, and how this shapes their turnover intentions. The message from this work is that the development of the self-investment subcomponent of identification can occur via proximal social cues for both small local and larger superordinate groups. Our results highlight the implications of the newcomers receiving feedback about the validity of their workplace behaviour from existing group members and their leader.

Previously, there was an absence of research on the effect of the subcomponents of identification on workplace turnover intentions. We have provided evidence that group-level satisfaction is particularly relevant to predicting turnover intentions in this newcomer context relative to the other subcomponents. There was also scarce empirical research that investigated the impact of different levels of identification at work on turnover intentions. We have evidence of the relative impact of these levels, with the organizational level being the predominant level at which turnover intentions can be predicted. Finally, we provide the novel finding that an imbalance in these levels in favour of the organization may

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4This does not mean to imply that the team level of identification is unimportant for newcomers. Team identification may predict other organizational or team outcomes. Indeed, previous research has indicated that in certain contexts where the team is highly salient, work team identification predicts turnover intentions (van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000; Moreland and Levine, 2001). Team identification is also highly related to the motivation to follow team goals (van Dick et al., 2009; Worchel et al., 1998), creative performance (Hirst, van Dick and van Knippenberg, 2009) and effective leadership (Morgeson, DeRue and Karam, 2010).
also contribute towards decreased turnover intentions. To our knowledge, this is the first time identity imbalance has been empirically explored.

The importance and relative novelty of the identity imbalance concept is evident in the fact that there is an emerging literature pointing to the significance of the multiplicity of identities, but this literature so far does not explicitly conceptualize or analyse identity imbalance, nor does it account for the impact of these diverse identities on turnover intentions (e.g. Johnson et al., 2006; Bartels et al., 2010). In future research, this concept should be further refined and operationalized before investigating how this variable operates at various stages in the socialization process and on various outcomes.

Our model and hypothesis testing brings together prior theorizing on the development of identification and its significance for organizational outcomes (e.g. Amiot et al., 2007; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Haslam, Postmes and Ellemers, 2003; van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000; Riketta and van Dick, 2005; van Vugt and Hart, 2004). We synthesize research on procedural justice (e.g. Tyler and Blader, 2000), multiple levels and dimensions of identity (e.g. Ellemers, Kortekaas and Ouwerkerk, 1999; van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000), social validation (e.g. Ashforth and Saks, 1996) and identity affirmation by leaders (Haslam and Platow, 2001; Haslam, Reicher and Platow, 2010). In investigating these variables when newcomers are at the highest period of risk in terms of potential turnover, this research is significant for uncovering the pattern of both significant and null effects described above. We have promoted exploration of new avenues through which managers might explore how they might make both emotional and cognitive connections with new staff that encourage them to stay.

**Future directions.** The cross-sectional nature of the study places constraints upon interpretation of the present data. The next stage in this research programme would be to test longitudinally whether social validation and fair treatment over time could instigate long-term integration of the new work identity and an associated robust commitment to stay in the organization. As a first step, it was preferable to test these links cross-sectionally, with a specific and large sample of employees (i.e. at the beginning of the socialization process). Before such a logistically complex long-term project could take place, however, it was first necessary to demonstrate the power of social validation and fair treatment in the immediate period after joining a new organization, as we have done here.

The current study is a first step towards a development model where subcomponents of identification become relatively more or less important to group members over time. This conceptual framework builds upon the current theorizing of Amiot and others (Amiot et al., 2007). Significantly, we need more research that examines the later stages proposed in these socialization models (e.g. Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008; for a review, see Bauer et al., 2007).

**Practical implications for organizations.** Employee turnover represents a huge financial and social loss to organizations (Kacmar et al., 2006). If turnover intentions are in part related to identity issues, efforts to develop the workplace identification of newcomers should reduce turnover intentions. Our findings highlight the utility of focusing upon the day-to-day interactions of new employees with their existing teams and team leaders in building this identification.

Yet, work teams and the team leader do not often play significant roles in the formal socialization process, as socialization programmes are often centralized (e.g. Allen, 2006; Ashforth and Saks, 1996; Morrison, 1993). Organizations should consider implementing a regular contact scheme through which newcomers have opportunities for identity-affirming social validation by their work team and team leader. This strategy would encourage social validation of new staff members and provide them with the vital cues that they are normative and accepted ingroup members (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008; Festinger, 1950, 1954; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). Organizations should ensure that the treatment of staff is fair and procedures are transparent. Making fair treatment an explicit, core value of the organization makes newcomers feel respected and positive towards the organization as a whole (Restubog et al., 2008; Tyler and Blader, 2000; Walumba, Cropanzano and Hartnell, 2009). Team leaders and managers should be encouraged to reinforce those fair treatment norms within their work teams.

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Conclusion

This research tested two fundamental psychological factors that help to psychologically attach a newcomer to an organization. Obviously, our focus on social validation and fairness does not downplay the importance of other factors in the development of organizational identity, such as socialization tactics, role mastery and relative organizational distinctiveness, which all contribute uniquely to the newcomers’ ‘life space’ (Lewin, 1936). Rather, this programme of research will continue to explore the subcomponents of identification that influence individuals in their first few months of organizational membership, and that can shape their decisions to stay or leave. In doing so, we hope to contribute not only to an improved theoretical account of the processes of identity integration and newcomer socialization, but also to provide insights into practical solutions that employers can use to ease the transition phase for both the organization and their employees.

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Laura G.E. Smith is a lecturer at the University of Queensland. She received her PhD in social psychology from the University of Exeter (2008). She was a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Queensland, where she was promoted to lecturer in 2010. Her research on the development of social identities has recently appeared in the European Journal of Social Psychology and the British Journal of Social Psychology.

Catherine E. Amiot is an assistant professor in psychology at the University of Québec at Montreal. She was awarded a PhD in psychology from the University of Ottawa in 2004. Her research into social identity change and integration has appeared in Personality and Social Psychology Review, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin and the Journal of Management, among others. Her research interests include coping with change, social identity, and self-determination.
Victor J. Callan is Professor of Management and Research Director at the University of Queensland Business School. Victor has published widely on organizational change, corporate communication, identity, and stress and coping. His current research projects are investigations into employee socialization, and the utility of medical networks. His recent research into such topics has appeared in *Journal of Management, Journal of Vocational Behaviour, Human Relations* and the *British Journal of Management*.

Deborah J. Terry is Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at the University of Queensland. She received a PhD (1989) from the Australian National University, and joined the School of Psychology at the University of Queensland in 1990. Her primary research interests are in the areas of attitudes, social influence, persuasion, group processes and intergroup relations. She holds editorial positions with the *British Journal of Psychology* and the *European Journal of Social Psychology*.

Joanne R. Smith is a senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Exeter. She received her PhD from the University of Queensland in 2003 and was a research fellow there until 2007. She has published over 30 articles or chapters on attitudes, social influence and social identity processes and her work has been funded by the Australian Research Council and the British Academy.