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Transfer attitudes & transfer adjustment: a longitudinal study

Cynthia D. Fisher
Bond University, cynthia_fisher@bond.edu.au

James B. Shaw
Bond University

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"Transfer Attitudes & Transfer Adjustment: A Longitudinal Study"

Cynthia D Fisher & James B Shaw

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Transfer Attitudes and Transfer Adjustment:  
A Longitudinal Study  

Cynthia D. Fisher  
and  
James B. Shaw  

School of Business  
Bond University  
Gold Coast, Queensland 4229  
Australia  

61-75-952215  
FAX 61-75-951160  

Running Head: Employee Transfers  

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Transfer Attitudes and Transfer Adjustment:  
A Longitudinal Study

This study identified correlates of attitude toward an impending employer-initiated relocation, then followed up by predicting post-transfer attitude and adjustment difficulty in the same sample. Predictors suggested by past research on mobility attitudes (i.e. demographic characteristics and attributes of the pre-move location) were less important in explaining pre-move attitude toward the transfer than were expected attributes of the new location. After the move, experienced aspects of the new location such as role ambiguity, degree of advancement, and community and job satisfaction were the strongest predictors of overall post-move attitude and adjustment difficulty. In many cases, pre-move expectations about attributes of the new location were not related to affect or adjustment after the move, suggesting that pre-move expectations may have been inaccurate. Implications for theory, research, and organizational practice are discussed.
Transfer Attitudes and Transfer Adjustment:
A Longitudinal Study

Each year in the United States almost half a million employees are
relocated by their employers. Many companies which transfer employees
report having problems with employee reluctance to relocate, though both
employers and employees often decide that "the professional reasons for a
relocation outweigh the personal reasons for not relocating" ("Fifty-seven
ways," 1990). Repeatedly refusing to relocate may mean career plateauing,
so many career-minded employees feel that they have little choice but to
accept transfers (Pinder, 1989). In plant-closing situations or for military
employees, there is even less discretion to turn down employer-initiated
transfers. It is apparent that a number of employees each year undertake
moves that they are less than completely pleased about. Of interest both to
organizational researchers and managers are the factors that 1) are related
to people's attitudes and appraisals of potential moves, and 2) that predict
actual adjustment and satisfaction following the move. It is entirely
possible that these are not the same. In the following pages, we will report
the results of a longitudinal study of factors related to relocation attitudes
and adjustment to transfer in a sample of U.S. Air Force personnel. First,
we will examine the current research on transfer which influenced our
design and hypotheses.

Most of the research on relocation has taken one of two approaches.
First, there are studies which examine adjustment to a past relocation using
cross-sectional surveys. Respondents are asked to think back to their most
recent move and report on various aspects of the move. The elapsed time
between the actual relocation and answering the survey can be two years
or more (c.f. Munton, 1990; Pinder & Schroeder, 1987). Retrospective data
are somewhat suspect, and when the interval is as long as these, caution
must be applied in interpreting the findings (Greenwald, 1980). Here-to-
fore, only Brett and Werbel (1980) have collected both pre- and post-move
data from the same sample within a reasonable period of time surrounding
the move.

The second approach consists of studies of the correlates of reported
willingness to relocate or mobility intentions. There is no actual transfer
opportunity involved, and mobility attitudes are assessed in general terms
without regard to a specific new job or location (c.f. Gould & Penley, 1985;
Noe, Steffy, & Barber, 1988; Swanson, Luloff, & Warland, 1979; Veiga, 1983).
Because nearly all actual decisions to relocate are made with a specific
place/job in mind, it is unclear how relevant these studies are to the affect
that would be aroused at the prospect of a particular employer-initiated
transfer opportunity.

Finally, prior research on relocation has confined itself either to
domestic moves, excluding all subjects so uncooperative as to be transferred
overseas, or to the adjustment of expatriates following their posting abroad.
There has been little communication between these two literatures until
very recently (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991), yet many of the stresses
facing transferees in either case should be similar. The present study is
thought to be the first to include both domestic and overseas movers.

The dependent variables in this study are pre-move attitude toward
the impending relocation, post-move attitude to the new situation, and post-
move adjustment difficulty. Several classes of independent variables have
been proposed as possible predictors of relocation attitudes and adjustment
(c.f. Brett & Reilly, 1988). These include demographic characteristics of the
employee and his or her family, aspects of the job and community occupied
prior to the transfer, and aspects of the new job and community. Each of
these classes of variables are discussed below and hypotheses for variables
in each category are developed.
Demographics

A number of demographic characteristics have been proposed as possible correlates of mobility attitudes or later adjustment to transfer. These include variables such as age, career and family stage, spouse employment status and job involvement, number and age of children, functional specialty, education, income, past move history, and the like (c.f. Brett & Reilly, 1988). The demographic variables assessed in our study are discussed below.

Family Size. Both folk wisdom and a number of non-empirical articles have suggested that number of children living at home should be negatively related to mobility attitudes and behavior, on the assumption that moving more people is more difficult, and that children, particularly teenagers (Pinder, 1989), might be quite upset by being uprooted. There is surprisingly little empirical support for this idea. Brett & Reilly (1988), Gould & Penley (1985), and Munton (1990) found that number of children did not affect mobility attitudes or post-move adjustment. Nevertheless, we explore this intuitively reasonable idea once again using the demographic variable number of dependents (spouse plus children).

H1: Number of dependents will be negatively correlated with pre- and post-move attitude and positively related to adjustment difficulty following transfer.

Transfer History. It has often been suggested that aspects of transfer history should be predictive of mobility attitudes and/or adjustment following a move. One such aspect is the total number of transfers an individual has experienced. If individuals learn to cope with moving by moving, then individuals who have moved more times should feel more confident about undertaking subsequent moves and will have developed the skills needed to adjust quickly following another move. The writing on expatriate adjustment also suggests that previous international
experience should enhance adjustment to subsequent overseas assignments by providing both realistic expectations and intercultural skills (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Church, 1982). Experience at military moves of any sort should increase familiarity with relocation procedures and skills at dealing with the associated red tape, thus reducing some sources of surprise and stress in subsequent moves. Therefore, total number of moves is expected to correlate with attitudes and adjustment. If the skills learned are specific to type of move (for instance, special skills are needed and learned in connection with overseas moves), then number of past overseas and domestic moves would be expected to predict attitude and adjustment to that respective type of move.

Surprisingly, the expected relationship between past transfers and attitudes or adjustment has often failed to materialize in the empirical research on both domestic and foreign transfers (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Brett & Reilly, 1988; Munton & Forster, 1990; Pinder & Das, 1979; Pinder & Schroeder, 1987; Torbion, 1982). This has prompted Pinder and Schroeder (1987) to suggest that adjustment may be transfer-specific, due more to aspects of the particular new location and job than to generic skills in coping with relocation learned from prior moves. In this study we are able to compare the relative predictive power of various aspects of past transfer history to specific attributes of the new location. The effects of transfer history, while perhaps weak, are expected to be as follows:

H2: Total number of moves will be positively associated with pre- and post-move attitude and negatively related to adjustment difficulty.

H3: Number of prior overseas assignments will be positively related to attitudes and negatively related to adjustment difficulty for international transferees, while number of domestic moves will be
positively related to attitudes and negatively related to adjustment difficulty for domestic movers.

Number of moves has been assumed to affect mobility attitudes and behavior via its effect on moving self-efficacy beliefs or coping skills. We did not measure the latter constructs directly, but an indirect indicator of their presence may be ease of adjustment to the most recent prior move. Individuals who have a recent history of successfully and easily adjusting to a transfer should be more willing to try moving again and should again adjust with relative ease. Brett and Werbel (1980) reported weak but significant relationships between the difficulty of the most recent move for various family members and their willingness to move again.

H4: Difficulty of adjustment to the last move will be negatively associated with pre- and post-move attitude and positively related to adjustment difficulty for the next move.

While mobility is a way of life for the individuals in our sample, they do have the opportunity to nominate their preferred locations for future transfers. Thus, one important aspect of transfer history on which our respondents differed was the number of preferred locations to which they had been assigned compared to the total number of past assignments. One might expect that individuals who have received a high ratio of desired assignments would have a more favorable attitude toward a proposed future move for several reasons. First, there should be some residual positive affect about moving in general if most past moves have been to desired locations. Second, these individuals may simply find a long list of different places desirable, and this easy-to-please quality may carry over to the specific new assignment as well. Third, these individuals may believe that they have been treated unusually well in their past assignment history, and so may feel that taking their turn at a location they find less desirable is fair and equitable in the larger scheme of things (Adams, 1965).
H5: Ratio of preferred assignments to total assignments will be positively related to pre- and post-move attitudes and negatively related to adjustment difficulty.

Other Stressors. Moving is considered stressful because it disrupts normal patterns of behavior and requires high effort to reimpose order and predictability in an unfamiliar setting (Brett, 1980). One might expect that relocating would be even more of a burden if an unusually high number of stressful life events had already drained one’s emotional and/or physical reserves. Thus, we asked our respondents to fill out a stressful life events checklist about occurrences which were unrelated to the move, but had happened in the 12 months prior to the move.

H6: Number of stressful life events preceding the move will be negatively correlated with pre- and post-move attitude and positively correlated with adjustment difficulty.

Pre-Move Location Attributes

A second class of predictors of attitudes toward a proposed move and later adjustment to the move includes aspects of the pre-move location. Moving to a new site means learning to cope with the new location but also giving up valued aspects of the prior location, including the job, friends, involvement in non-work organizations, a residence, and other attributes of the community which may have been very satisfying (climate, city size, etc.) Individuals should be more reluctant to move when they are more strongly attached to the pre-move location, and thus have more to lose when leaving it.

Time in Location. One possible indicator of extent of involvement in a community is the length of time one has been living there, on the assumption that involvement and commitment to people and non-work organizations in the community increase over time. Several studies have found negative relationships between time in community and reported
willingness to move (Bach & Smith, 1977; Gould & Penley, 1985; Noe, Steffy, & Barber, 1988; Swanson, et al. 1979), but no one has assessed whether time in previous community is predictive of adjustment difficulty or attitudes toward the new location after a move actually takes place. If long tenure in a familiar location reduces flexibility or requires more grieving before getting on with the business of adjusting to a new location, such a relationship might be expected.

H7: Years in the pre-move location will be negatively related to pre- and post-move attitude and positively related to adjustment difficulty in the new location.

Pre-Move Job and Community Satisfaction. A more direct indicator of how much people are potentially giving up when they must move is their level of satisfaction with the prior job and community. Noe et al. (1988) found that individuals who are more satisfied with their current job say they are less willing to accept a lateral or downward transfer. Swanson et al. (1979) found no relationship between community satisfaction and reported future willingness to move for better employment opportunities, but a number of sociological studies of migration support the idea that community satisfaction is negatively related to intentions to relocate (Bach & Smith, 1977; Speare, 1974). No studies have reported positive relationships between pre- and post-move community satisfaction, but recent research on the stability of job attitudes by Staw and his colleagues (Staw, Bell, & Clausen, 1986) might suggest that people who were dissatisfied with one situation are likely to be dissatisfied with the next one as well, perhaps due to dispositional factors such as negative affectivity. On balance, however, it seems reasonable to expect that the more extreme the satisfaction with the pre-move location and job, the less likely it is that the new situation will be equally or more satisfying, hence a negative relationship.
H8: Satisfaction with the pre-move job and pre-move community will be negatively related to pre- and post-move attitude and positively related to adjustment difficulty following the move.

Attributes of the New Situation

A third class of predictors of mobility attitudes and post-move attitudes and adjustment is made up of attributes of the new community and job. Perceptions or expectations about these attributes can be assessed prior to the move, and should affect willingness to move. After the move, actual experienced attributes of the new setting should be the strongest predictors of attitudes and adjustment to the new situation.

Location. One obvious aspect of the new assignment is its geographical location, in particular whether it is in the United States or overseas. Overseas moves should be somewhat more difficult to cope with (Black et al., 1991), even when moving directly on to an American military base, and in fact 56% of our overseas movers lived off base in their new location. In any overseas move, isolation from family members is greater, the environment off the base is less familiar, and there are likely to be more settling-in problems (such as electrical compatibility of appliances, opportunity for spouse employment, schooling for children). Qualitative data collected from this sample indicated that many of our respondents saw the chance to travel and see other parts of the world as an advantage of military jobs. Thus, we do not hypothesize that overseas movers will be any more reluctant to go or like their new assignment any less, but we would expect to see an effect of location on adjustment difficulty.

H9: Overseas movers will experience more adjustment difficulty than will domestic movers.

Advancement and Job Similarity. Several studies have found that individuals are more satisfied after transfers which represent a career advancement than those which do not (Burke, 1974; Gerpott, Domsch, &
Employee Transfers

Pearson, 1985; Pinder 1977), and say they are more willing to move for a promotion than for a lateral or lower level position (Noe et al., 1988).

Another aspect of the new job is its similarity to the prior job. Brett (1980) has suggested that moves to similar jobs should be less disruptive and easier to adjust to. Pinder and Schroeder (1987) verified that self-reported time-to-proficiency following transfers to dissimilar jobs was longer than for moves to similar jobs. However, a similar job may not represent an advancement or provide enough of a new challenge to make the trauma of moving worthwhile, so similarity is not expected to predict attitudes toward the move.

H10: Perceived advancement will be positively correlated with pre- and post-move attitude toward the move, and negatively correlated with post-move adjustment difficulty.

H11: Job similarity will be negatively correlated with adjustment difficulty following the move.

Friends at the New Location. There is a great deal of evidence that social support facilitates coping with work stress in general (House, 1981), and with job changes in particular (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Brett & Werbel, 1980; Gerpott, et al. 1985). As Ammons, Nelson, and Wodarski (1982) have pointed out, moving is especially likely to be experienced as stressful because it isolates people from their sources of social support—friends and family in the pre-move location. One source of social support early in a move would be people in the new location who were already known to the mover. These individuals could serve as a source of emotional support as well as a source of information and uncertainty reduction both before the move and after arrival. Because the military is a highly mobile community, the likelihood of knowing one or more people at a new base is substantial. We asked our respondents about the number of people they
already knew that would be stationed at the new location when they arrived.

H12: Number of pre-existing friends at the new location will be positively related to pre- and post-move attitude and negatively related to adjustment difficulty.

Expectations. An extensive literature verifies the importance of accurate expectations in adjusting to a new job (Premack & Wanous, 1985). Regardless of the accuracy of expectations, simply having more knowledge of the new situation in advance should improve attitudes and facilitate adjustment by reducing uncertainty. For instance, Black (1988) found that pre-departure knowledge was very strongly related to the location adjustment of Japanese expatriates. Thus, we assessed whether transferees felt they "knew what to expect" about the new situation. Two more specific aspects of expectations were also assessed: expected satisfaction with the new job and expected satisfaction with the community. These were measured prior to the move, and were hypothesized be highly predictive of overall pre-move attitude toward the impending relocation. To the extent that a self-fulfilling prophecy takes place, or that movers accurately gauge the extent to which a new situation will meet their needs, expected satisfaction should also be related to post-move attitude and adjustment. For the same reasons, overall pre-move attitude toward the move should be related to attitude and adjustment after the move.

H13: Knowing what to expect will be positively related to pre- and post-move attitude toward the transfer and negatively related to adjustment difficulty.

H14: Expected job and community satisfaction will be positively related to pre- and post-move attitude and negatively related to adjustment difficulty.
H15: After arrival at the new situation, actual satisfaction with the community and job and current perceptions of advancement will be stronger correlates of overall attitude toward the move and of adjustment than were prior expectations about these aspects of the new situation.

H16: Pre-move attitude toward the move will be positively correlated with post-move attitude and negatively correlated with adjustment difficulty.

Role Ambiguity and Conflict. Additional variables encountered in the new situation should also contribute to attitude and adjustment. In any role learning situation, reducing uncertainty is a critical early task. To the extent that it is difficult to do so because the role is ambiguous and expectations unclear, or conflicting role expectations are encountered, adjustment becomes more difficult and time consuming. Role ambiguity and conflict are known to be negatively related to job satisfaction even among relatively long-tenure employees (Fisher & Gitelson, 1983) and it is not surprising that Black and his colleague have also found that these factors are negatively correlated with the adjustment of expatriates following a move to a new job and country (Black, 1988; Black & Gregersen, 1991).

H17: Role ambiguity and role conflict will be negatively related to post-move attitude and positively related to adjustment difficulty.

The hypotheses are summarized in Table 1. As mentioned previously, a number of the expected relationships between demographic variables and transfer attitudes or adjustment have failed to materialize in past research. An explanation of this can be found in attitude theory, which points out that the best prediction should be achieved by variables which are conceptually and temporally closest to the criterion (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Thus, pre-move expectations and beliefs about the specific new job
and location should be more predictive of attitude toward an impending move than are attitudes toward the present location or demographic factors. In turn, attitudes toward the present location should be stronger predictors of new location attitudes than are demographics, as the former represent evaluations of specific attributes which may be lost upon moving, while the latter are distant surrogates for assumed difficulty of moving due to variations in experience with moving or family size. Similarly, post-move experiences and beliefs in the new location should be more strongly related to measures of adjustment and overall affect about the new location than are pre-move attitudes and expectations, which should be more predictive than old location attributes or demographics. An additional rationale for this final prediction comes from Louis (1980), who suggests that the subjective contrast between an old and a new role often cannot be anticipated, and that by definition the surprise experienced during socialization to a new role is not anticipated in advance. These experiences can only be captured after the move when the new situation is encountered at first hand. Thus, post-move experiences should be the strongest predictors of post-move attitude and adjustment difficulty. The pattern of plusses and minuses in Table 1 indicates the relative strength of the relationships expected for more and less proximal sets of predictors.

H18: Variable sets will make relatively larger contributions to the prediction of move attitudes and adjustment the closer they are temporally and conceptually to the attitude or adjustment in question.

Table 1 About Here

METHOD

This study’s design remedies the problems with much of the earlier research on transfer by assessing the correlates of pre-move attitude
toward a specific, real, impending transfer (Time 1), then assessing and predicting post-move attitude and adjustment three months after arrival at the new location (Time 2).

Sample

The sample initially chosen consisted of 150 U.S. Air Force Non-Commissioned Officers (staff, technical, master, and chief master sergeants) who were scheduled to make a permanent change of station (PCS) and who were presently stationed at one of seven bases in three Southern states. One hundred forty three of these individuals appeared for their scheduled interview at Time 1, for a response rate of 95%. These individuals were mailed the Time 2 questionnaire three months after their planned moving date, and 99 returned usable data. In 27 of the original 143 cases, the PCS had been delayed or cancelled, the individual had left the military, or the individual could not be contacted via the forwarding address given during the interview. Thus, only 17 of the Time 1 respondents who were apparently eligible to continue participating in the study failed to reply to the Time 2 questionnaire, for an effective response rate of 85% at Time 2. Seventy-five percent of respondents were transferred to bases outside the United States.

Measures

Number of dependents was assessed by a single item. Transfer history indices (total moves, number of prior overseas moves, domestic moves, ratio of preferred to total assignments, and time in location [months at Time 1]) were constructed from Air Force records of dates, places, and pre-assignment preferences for all assignments since joining the Air Force.

Other stressors were assessed with a 14-item stressful life events checklist constructed by selecting relevant items from the Holmes and Rahe (1967) Social Readjustment Rating Scale. Individuals were asked to
check those events which had happened to them in the past twelve months but were not connected to the impending move. Sample items include marriage, divorce, serious personal illness, gain of new family member, and major change in financial state.

**Pre-move community satisfaction**, **expected community satisfaction** with the Time 2 location, and **actual community satisfaction** at Time 2 were each assessed by seven items. Three items asked about satisfaction with the base, housing, and community, while four asked about the extent to which the climate, city size, geographical location, and culture matched the respondent's ideal for these attributes. These items loaded on a single factor and had a coefficient alpha of .84 for Time 1, .86 for expected Time 2 satisfaction viewed from Time 1, and .83 for actual Time 2 community satisfaction.

**Job satisfaction** was assessed with two items - overall job satisfaction and the extent to which the job matched the respondent's ideal military job assignment. Reliabilities were .69 for the Time 1 job, .81 for expected Time 2 job satisfaction rated at Time 1, and .71 for actual Time 2 job satisfaction.

Perceptions about whether the new job represents an advancement, job similarity, and friends present in the new location were all assessed with single item measures, phrased as expectations in the Time 1 questionnaire and as "actual" in the Time 2 questionnaire.

Knowing what to expect of the Time 2 location was measured at Time 1 with three items about the amount of information which the respondent presently had or expected to receive prior to the move about the new location and job. A sample item was "Do you feel you know 'what to expect' about the new base and community?" The five-point response format had anchors at each point, ranging from "I have no idea what to expect" to "I know exactly what to expect." Coefficient alpha was .65.
Role ambiguity and role conflict were assessed by the respective 6 and 8 item scales developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). Reliabilities at Time 2 were .87 for ambiguity and .80 for conflict. Ambiguity items were recoded such that a high score indicates high ambiguity.

The dependent variables pre-move attitude and post-move attitude were measured by a facet-free, one dimensional measure consisting of five 7-point semantic differential items. Coefficient alpha was .91 at Time 1 and .93 at Time 2. The adjective pairs were rated with reference to "your upcoming move" at Time 1 and "your present assignment" at Time 2. The pairs were very good-very bad, very negative-very positive, pessimistic-optimistic, apprehensive-relaxed, unhappy-happy. A high score represented a positive evaluation of the new assignment. Factor analysis of these items together with the new community satisfaction and job satisfaction items mentioned above resulted in three very clear factors: move attitude items, community satisfaction items, and job satisfaction items. Thus, there is evidence that this measure of move attitude is distinct from other aspects of satisfaction.

Overall adjustment difficulty was assessed twice - at Time 1 retrospectively about the move to the Time 1 location, and at Time 2 about the adjustment process after the move to the Time 2 location. The Time 1 measure was used as a predictor and the Time 2 measure as a dependent variable. Seven adjustment items were administered at each time period. These consisted of three 7-point questions asking for ratings of the difficulty-ease of adjustment to the move as a whole, to the job, and to the coworkers, plus four items about how long it took to adjust. Specifically, we asked how many weeks it took (or probably would take, if the adjustment was not complete) to adjust to the move as a whole, to technical aspects of the job, to new coworkers, and to "get up to speed" on the job. Black (1988)
has suggested that adjustment to an international move is multi-dimensional (including adjustment to the job, to host nationals, and to everyday life), and factor analytic evidence from the present data would support a three-factor solution (job, coworkers, location). However, the resulting two and three item scales were considered too short, and the relationships of most predictors to the three aspects of adjustment were similar to their relationships to a combined seven-item scale including all facets of adjustment, so the latter was used for ease of presentation. This scale was formed by standardizing all seven adjustment items and then summing. Coefficient alpha for this measure was .73 at Time 1 and .77 at Time 2. A high score indicates a difficult and lengthy adjustment.

At Time 1, most items were administered in an oral interview. The question and response choices were shown to the interviewee on a card while the interviewer read the question aloud. The questions described above were interspersed with open-ended qualitative questions about aspects of moving which were of interest to the Air Force sponsors of the research. However, all questions used in the present study (except those involving number of weeks) were of fixed response format. At Time 2 all items were contained on a self-administered questionnaire, though the wording was virtually identical to the Time 1 items.

RESULTS

For most analyses, the domestic and overseas movers will be used as a single sample. The rationales for this are that a military move overseas should be more like a domestic move than the overseas moves typically experienced by corporate expatriates (because military movers enter a familiar structured setting which is populated largely by home country nationals), and that the adjustment tasks faced in any relocation are similar in kind if not in degree. Further, the domestic move sub-sample is rather
small to provide adequate power for a fair test, given the small to moderate size of the relationships expected.

In order to check for non-respondent bias, Time 1 scores on all dependent and independent variables were compared for Time 2 responders versus Time 2 non-responders. None of these t-tests were significant, indicating that there was no systematic non-respondent bias. Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, number of valid cases, and zero order correlations for all variables. Correlations relevant to the hypotheses appear in the lowest three lines of the Table.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 about the relationships of number of dependents and total number of past moves to attitude and adjustment were not supported. These are the demographic variables most often mentioned in past research on transfer, yet they consistently fail to account for much, if any, variance in mobility attitudes or post-move outcomes. Separating total number of moves into domestic versus overseas moves was not helpful in predicting pre- or post-move attitude in the respective destination groups. In addition, the number of prior overseas moves did not correlate with adjustment difficulty for overseas movers, suggesting that each overseas move may present unique problems to which past experience in another foreign location is largely irrelevant. However, number of domestic moves was strongly related to adjustment difficulty in the small subsample of domestic movers \( (r = -.64, p < .01, N = 21) \). People who had made more domestic moves had a much quicker and easier adjustment than those who had made fewer domestic moves. Thus, Hypothesis 3 received only limited support.

Two more specific aspects of move history were significantly related to pre-move (but not post-move) attitudes as predicted -- difficulty of
adjustment to the most recent prior move, and ratio of preferred to total assignment locations (Hypotheses 4 and 5). Those who had experienced a difficult adjustment to the last move were less positive about moving again, and those who had received a larger proportion of transfers to desired locations in the past were more favorably disposed to the upcoming move. Difficulty of adjustment to the prior move also predicted difficulty of adjustment to the next move. This might suggest the presence of coping/adjustment skills which come into play following any move.

Hypothesis 6 regarding recent stressful life events received no support, whether stress was operationalized as the simple sum of stressful events (correlations shown in Table 3), or as the severity-weighted sum as recommended by Holmes and Rahe (1967). The mean number of stressors experienced was only 1.4 (observed range 0 - 5 out of a possible 0-14), so the non-significant relationships observed in this sample may be partly a function of restriction in range. Future studies should continue to explore whether transfer is more difficult when it follows on the heels of significant stresses in other areas of employees' lives.

Pre-move job satisfaction was not related to pre-move or post-move attitude or to adjustment difficulty. Time in location and pre-move community satisfaction were both negatively related to pre-move attitude as expected, providing some support for Hypotheses 7 and 8. However, these variables were not related to post-move attitude or adjustment difficulty three months after the move. These findings suggest that people may recover rather quickly from leaving a location to which they were attached, and that escaping from a disliked location conveys no special advantage in subsequently adjusting to a new location.

Hypothesis 9 suggested that domestic and overseas movers would differ in adjustment difficulty, but not in attitude. T-tests were conducted to test this hypothesis. There were no significant differences on the three
dependent variables, indicating that overseas moves were as easy to adjust to and viewed as positively both before and after the move as were domestic moves. To further explore the differences between domestic and overseas moves, t-tests were conducted on the predictor variables. Individuals making overseas moves said they had less idea what to expect in advance of the move (t = 2.55, p < .05) and experienced more role ambiguity (t = 2.21, p < .05) and marginally more role conflict (t = 1.93, p < .06) as compared to domestic movers. These results are consistent with Black et al.'s (1991) contention that overseas moves tend to involve more uncertainty than domestic moves. Overseas movers also expected to like (t = 2.09, p < .05) and actually liked the new community less (t = 2.16, p < .05) than domestic movers. On the whole, however, the differences between the two destination groups were few and small in magnitude, lending support to the decision to combine the two groups for most analyses.

The next set of hypotheses concerns expected and actual aspects of the specific post-move situation. These are predicted to be stronger correlates of attitude and adjustment than were demographics or pre-move location variables. Hypothesis 10 about advancement was supported. Expected advancement was correlated with both pre- and post-move attitude, and post-move perceptions of advancement were related to both post-move attitude and adjustment. As expected, job similarity (Hypothesis 11) was not related to pre-move attitude, but actual job similarity at Time 2 had the expected negative relationship to adjustment difficulty. That is, it is easier and quicker to adjust to a move in which job duties are similar to those performed before the move. Note that role ambiguity and conflict were also negatively related to job similarity.

Expecting to have old friends already at the new location was positively related to pre-move attitude (Hypothesis 12). In addition to providing emotional support, old friends are probably a source of
informational support and uncertainty reduction (House, 1981). This idea is borne out by the significant positive correlation between having old friends in the new location and knowing what to expect prior to the move, and the negative relationships between actually having friends present and role ambiguity and conflict. However, number of friends was not related to attitude or adjustment assessed three months after the move. It is possible that old friends would be predictive of shorter-term attitudes and adjustment, perhaps during the first two or three weeks in a new location when these individuals can be most helpful in reducing initially very high levels of uncertainty. New friends and other sources of social support not assessed in this study, such as the new superior (c.f. Brett & Werbel, 1980), may play a larger role in medium and long term adjustment and attitudes.

Knowing what to expect before the move (Hypothesis 13) was related to pre-move attitude as predicted, and was the only pre-move variable which was significantly related to both post-move attitude and adjustment difficulty. Those who had a better idea what to expect in advance of the move also reported less role ambiguity after the move ($r = -.33, p < .01$). Expected community and expected job satisfaction were the strongest predictors of pre-move attitude. These pre-move anticipations were hypothesized to be significantly (but less strongly) related to post-move outcomes as well, but they were not significant at all. Thus, Hypothesis 14 received only partial support. However, Hypothesis 15 was supported, in that post-move reports of actual community and job satisfaction and advancement were strongly related to overall post-move attitude and adjustment. This pattern of results suggests that pre-move expectations of community and job satisfaction were not entirely accurate.

The predictions that role conflict and ambiguity would be related to post-move attitude and adjustment were largely supported, with the role ambiguity correlations being especially strong (Hypothesis 17). Finally,
Hypothesis 18 about the relative strength of different classes of independent variables also received support, with Time 2 variables having the highest zero-order correlations with Time 2 outcomes, and Time 1 expectations about the specific new job and community being the strongest correlates of pre-move attitude. However, demographics were not always less predictive than pre-move location attributes as had been expected.

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to ascertain the amount of variance in move attitude and adjustment which could be explained by the sets of independent variables. The sets, entered into the equation in order of increasing temporal and conceptual closeness to the dependent variables, were 1) demographic variables, 2) pre-move location variables, 3) Time 1 expectations about the move, and 4) Time 2 reports on actual conditions after the move (not included for the prediction of pre-move attitude). This order of entry gave more distal variables every chance to account for variance and provided a more stringent test of the hypothesis that proximal variables would be the best predictors. In order to maintain a reasonable variables-to-cases ratio, only independent variables which had significant zero-order correlations with the dependent variable in question were retained to represent their respective sets. The results of these analyses appear in Table 3.

![Table 3 About Here](image)

A substantial amount of the variance in the dependent variables is explained by the independent variables, with adjusted $R^2$s of .38 for pre-move attitude, .61 for post-move attitude, and .36 for adjustment difficulty. All three sets of independent variables added significantly to the prediction of pre-move attitude, but the largest change in $R^2$ (28%) occurred with the addition of the conceptually closest predictor set -- expectations about the new situation. The independent variables with significant betas in the
complete equation for pre-move attitude were expected satisfaction with the new community and satisfaction with the pre-move community, the latter carrying the hypothesized negative weight.

Post-move attitude was significantly predicted by pre-move attitude and the set containing pre-move expectations, but again the greatest share of the variance (47%) was accounted for by the more proximal post-move variable set, particularly actual advancement, actual community satisfaction, and role ambiguity. Adjustment difficulty in the new assignment was predicted by one demographic variable, past adjustment difficulty, but no other pre-move variables added significantly to the equation. Post-move variables, most notably role ambiguity, contributed the most to the prediction of adjustment difficulty.

DISCUSSION

This research points up some possible weaknesses of prior findings on general mobility attitudes and intentions. The earlier research tradition attempted to predict mobility attitudes without regard to a specific target location, yet most decisions to move are made with a destination in mind. In this study, the variables which accounted for the largest amount of variance in pre-move attitude toward a transfer were expectations about aspects of the specific new location. More generic predictors of mobility attitudes such as demographics and satisfaction with the present community were substantially less important in explaining pre-move attitude. Although the present subjects did not have much leeway to make a decision about whether to transfer or not, one would certainly expect that subjects who have such a choice would also be more influenced by expectations about specific aspects of the new location than by demographics or past location variables.

Adapting the Mobley (1977) turnover model to the mobility/migration literature and the present results, one might suggest
that demographic predispositions, pre-move location attributes, and
general "mobility attitudes" represent three preliminary steps in the
decision to move, perhaps culminating in an intention to search for new
demographic predispositions, pre-move location attributes, and
locations or opportunities. The mobility literature seldom addresses the
next step in the decision process, that of evaluating the opportunities found
preliminary steps in the decision to move, perhaps culminating in an intention to search for new
on their specific merits—weighing attributes such as advancement and
locations or opportunities. The mobility literature seldom addresses the
anticipated satisfaction which were highly predictive in this study. In the
next step in the decision process, that of evaluating the opportunities found
case of employer-initiated transfers, the first steps need not occur, the
on their specific merits—weighing attributes such as advancement and
decision to search is irrelevant, and probably only the single offered
anticipated satisfaction which were highly predictive in this study. In the
location is evaluated.

In sum, individuals' pre-move feelings about moving are most
strongly related to pre-move expectations about attributes of the new
location. However, very few pre-move variables were significant
predictors of post-move outcomes. As predicted in Hypotheses 18, the bulk
of the variance in post-move attitude and adjustment was accounted for by
Time 2 experiences/assessments of the new location, even when these
variables were entered into the regression equation after all the Time 1
predictors. Time 2 perceptions of advancement, new community and job
satisfaction, and role ambiguity were especially strong correlates of post-
move attitude and adjustment.

These findings suggest that individuals may be forming attitudes and
making decisions about organization-initiated transfer opportunities based
on rather inaccurate expectations about what the situation will be like in
the new location. Further evidence for this is provided by the relatively
low correlations of expected community satisfaction with actual community
satisfaction (.51), expected job satisfaction with actual job satisfaction (.38),
and expected advancement with post-move reports of advancement (.21),
and perhaps most important, pre-move attitude with post-move attitude
(.38). Pre-move attitude toward the transfer accounts for only 15% of the
variance in post-move attitude toward the new location. All of these correlations are positive and significant, but are far smaller than one would like given that major life decisions are being made on the basis of Time 1 beliefs.

If subsequent research in civilian samples reveals a similar lack of accuracy in anticipating post-transfer reactions, one recommendation would be that organizations provide more information to employees who are being asked to consider moving. Future research might attempt to manipulate the amount of prior information made available to movers, in effect testing the realistic job preview concept in the transfer situation. If this approach is effective, movers should be able to do a better job of anticipating their reactions to a new location and choosing to avoid locations in which they would be unhappy. Alternatively, attitude and adjustment to the move may be improved via the RJP-postulated mechanisms of increased commitment to making an informed choice succeed, more effective coping with difficult but expected aspects of the new situation, or reduced discrepancy between expectations and reality (Breaugh, 1983).

Turning to a consideration of post-move outcomes, one might ask what light this study can shed on the mechanisms involved in adjusting to a transfer. Two categories of variables seem to emerge from an examination of the significant predictors of post-move attitude and adjustment difficulty, and these categories give some clues about possible underlying processes. One category consists of variables which seem to relate to the level of uncertainty experienced, such as similarity of the new job to the prior job, role conflict and ambiguity, and knowing what to expect in advance. The significance of these predictors is consistent with Brett’s (1980) view that adjusting to transfer is largely a matter of reducing uncertainty, re-establishing routines, and gaining a feeling of control in
the new environment. Thus, one major process which underlies adjustment and the development of positive attitudes following a move may be the reduction of uncertainty, or as Louis (1980) would call it, sense-making.

A second category of predictors of post-transfer outcomes involves the evaluation of objective aspects of the new situation, such as whether the job is an advancement or not, job satisfaction, and community satisfaction. That is, whether aspects of the new situation meet one's needs or match one's values (Locke, 1976). The significance of this second set of variables partially supports Pinder's (Carruthers & Pinder, 1983; Pinder & Schroeder, 1987) contention that adjustment to a move is largely dependent on characteristics of the new situation. It is an addition to Brett's ideas by suggesting that familiarity does not necessarily breed liking. An individual may have successfully reduced uncertainty after a move, but still be intensely unhappy about living in a large/small/wet/dry/cold/hot city with a job he or she dislikes for any number of reasons. It seems that a thorough understanding of post-transfer outcomes depends on variables related to adjustment during the immediate post-transfer "acute" phase, when reducing uncertainty is a critical task, and on the long-term fit between aspects of the new location and the individual's own preferences. Certainly organizations which transfer people should be concerned with both sets of factors.

Several caveats must be considered in interpreting the results of this study. First, we chose to collect post-move data three months after the move, so the generalizability of our findings to other intervals following a transfer cannot be taken for granted. Future research might explore the predictors of adjustment and attitudes at different time periods after a move, as there seem to be reasonable theoretical arguments for why these might differ. Adler (1986) has suggested that expatriates' experience
predictable phases of adjustment after moving abroad, from an initial positively-toned honeymoon period to a negatively-toned culture shock period and back to a more neutral level of affect. Predictors might be different in each phase, for instance pre-move location variables may be particularly salient during the culture shock period when contrasts between old and new location are most painfully encountered. As suggested above, predictors which have to do with uncertainty or its reduction should have their greatest predictive power shortly after the move, while the match of the situation to personal preferences may play a role in both short and long term outcomes.

Second, the conclusion that demographic factors are relatively unimportant compared to expected and actual attributes of the new setting must be tempered with several cautions. First, only a limited subset of demographic factors were assessed in this study. Unmeasured variables such as ages of children or spouse employment status may be demographic factors with greater predictive power than the measures of family size and transfer history used here (Brett & Reilly, 1988). Second, all our subjects had moved several times before, on average 5.7 times since joining the military. It may be that number of past moves has a strong but non-linear relationship with move attitude and adjustment difficulty, such that an individual's or family's first move away from a location in which they have spent their entire lives will be much more traumatic than any number of subsequent moves. Our sample did not include any first-time movers, so we were unable to explore this end of the transfer frequency continuum.

A third issue concerns causality. Although this study utilized a longitudinal design, a number of hypotheses concerned concurrent correlations. We have selected pre- and post-move attitude and adjustment as our dependent variables, but there is no guarantee that they are actually at the end of the causal chain. For instance, it is possible that post-move
attitude precedes satisfaction with the community and job by tinting the lens through which these aspects of the new situation are viewed. We also have not addressed the issue of causal order between the Time 2 dependent variables of post-move attitude and adjustment, which are correlated -.35. It seems logical that there may be some degree of reciprocal causation - a negative attitude could impede adjustment, and a difficult or prolonged adjustment could certainly sour attitudes. Alternatively, unmeasured third variables, such as the "culture toughness" of the location (Mendenhall & Oddou) or objective difficulties with the move (housing problems, a required separation from family, problems with children, etc.) may affect both attitude and adjustment. The clearest causality would seem to be between the more enduring and objective Time 1 variables such as time in location or ratio of preferred moves and Time 2 outcomes.

A final issue concerns generalizability. Some may question the extent to which the transfer experiences of military employees are relevant to those of civilian employees. Certainly individuals who choose to make the military a career have accepted the likelihood of frequent moves, but the same can be said of employees who join some private-sector organizations well known for a high rate of employee transfers (e.g., IBM -- I've Been Moved). An additional point of similarity to the civilian sector is that all the moves we studied were individual changes of station, not "unit rotations" in which an intact work group moves together. Further, many of the same activities and processes occur in any move, civilian or military, domestic or overseas. People must pack up all their belongings, leave their friends and coworkers, establish a new residence and social links, and learn to fit in at a new job. These similarities seem quite substantial compared to any possible dissimilarities between civilian and military moves. Finally, it is true that members of our sample had limited discretion to turn down the proposed transfer, but as mentioned earlier,
many civilian employees have little true discretion either. The fact that refusing to move was almost not an option for our sample served to assure that the full range of pre-move attitudes was represented, and was thus an advantage to the study.

In conclusion, this study suggests that organizations should provide as much information as possible prior to a transfer, so that decisions to accept or reject a mobility opportunity can be based on accurate expectations about the future location. Providing information serves the dual purpose of reducing uncertainty surrounding the move itself and potentially enhancing the long term match between location characteristics and employee preferences. In addition, organizations should attempt to link transfers to advancement opportunities and should strive to minimize role ambiguity on the new job in order to facilitate the satisfaction and adjustment of transferred employees. When quick performance is needed after a transfer, an individual who has rapidly adjusted to past transfers and is currently performing a very similar job should be selected for the move.
REFERENCES


TABLE 1
Hypothesized Direction and Strength of Relationships\textsuperscript{a}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Numbers of Dependents</th>
<th>Total Past Moves</th>
<th>Overseas Moves\textsuperscript{b}</th>
<th>Domestic Moves\textsuperscript{b}</th>
<th>Past Adjustment Difficulty</th>
<th>Ratio Preferred</th>
<th>Other Stressors</th>
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<tr>
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<td>+</td>
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<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Move Attitude</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjustment Difficulty</td>
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</table>

**Old Location Attributes**

| Time in Location                  | -            | -                     | +                |
| Pre-Move Community Satisfaction   | -            | -                     | +                |
| Pre-Move Job Satisfaction         | -            | -                     | +                |

**Expected New Location Attributes**

| Expected Advancement              | +++          | ++                    | -                |
| Expected Job Similarity           | 0            | 0                     | -                |
| Expected Friends                  | +++          | ++                    | -                |
| What to Expect                    | +++          | ++                    | -                |
| Expected Community satisfaction   | +++          | ++                    | -                |
| Expected Job satisfaction         | +++          | ++                    | -                |
| Pre-Move Attitude                 | +++          | ++                    | -                |

**Actual New Location Attributes**

| Actual Advancement                | +++          | 0                     |
| Actual Job Similarity             | 0            | -                     |
| Actual Friends                    | +++          | -                     |
| Actual Community Satisfaction     | +++          | -                     |
| Actual Job Satisfaction           | +++          | -                     |
| Role Ambiguity                    | -            | +                     |
| Role Conflict                     | -            | +                     |

\textsuperscript{a} Expected relative strength of relationships is indicated by the number of plus or minus signs.

\textsuperscript{b} These hypotheses refer to the overseas and domestic move subsamples, respectively.
### Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations of All Study Variables

#### Demographics

|  | M | SD | N | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |
| 1 | Numbers of Dependents | 2.6 | 1.3 | 143 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |
| 2 | Overseas Moves | 1.8 | 1.4 | 147 | 14 | .83** |
| 3 | Domestic Moves | 4.9 | 1.6 | 29 | .33 | .87** |
| 4 | Past Adjustment Difficulty | 0 | 4.3 | 139 | .83 | -.23** | -.16 | -.44* |
| 5 | Ratio Preferred | .67 | .3 | 134 | -.08 | .04 | .01 | .09 | -.33** |
| 6 | Time in Location | 4.4 | 1.3 | 143 | .33 | .86 | .03 | .22 | -.03 | .08 |

#### Pre-Move Location Attributes

| 8 | Time in location | 44.5 | 27.6 | 142 | .06 | -.13 | -.02 | -.08 | .50 | -.17 | .01 |
| 9 | Pre-move community satisfaction | 23.2 | 6.3 | 112 | .06 | .13 | .08 | -.07 | .20* | -.02 | .19* |

#### Expected New Location Attributes

| 10 | Pre-move job satisfaction | 7.0 | 2.4 | 141 | -.02 | -.09 | -.24* | .31 | -.05 | -.05 | .01 | .08 | .15 |

#### Actual Location Attributes

| 11 | Actual advancement | 4.7 | 1.8 | 124 | -.15 | -.24 | -.08 | .01 | -.03 | .25** | .06 | -.07 | .01 |
| 12 | Actual job similarity | 2.3 | 1.5 | 96 | -.17 | -.02 | .09 | -.02 | -.31** | -.08 | .04 | -.03 | -.18 | .29** | .01 | .49** | .24 | .17 | -.06 | -.07 | .18 | .06 |
| 13 | Actual friends | 2.0 | 1.2 | 98 | -.02 | -.06 | .20 | .35** | .34 | -.09 | .23* | .17 | -.07 | .02 | .17 | .07 | .02 | .74** | .59** | .10 | .09 | .11 | .01 |
| 14 | Actual community satisfaction | 21.1 | 6.2 | 95 | -.01 | .17 | .05 | .22 | -.04 | .01 | .02 | -.06 | .03 | .75* | .21 | -.01 | .18 | .42** | .51** | .16 | .34** | .05 | .24 |
| 15 | Actual job satisfaction | 7.2 | 2.2 | 98 | -.03 | .12 | .51 | .20 | .14 | .04 | .02 | -.06 | .19 | .17 | .15 | .07 | .16 | .05 | .38** | .36** | .26** | .06 | .32** |
| 16 | Actual friends | 2.0 | 1.2 | 98 | -.02 | -.06 | .20 | .35** | .34 | -.09 | .23* | .17 | -.07 | .02 | .17 | .07 | .02 | .74** | .59** | .10 | .09 | .11 | .01 |
| 17 | Role conflict | 16.5 | 7.2 | 95 | -.01 | .17 | .05 | .22 | -.04 | .01 | .02 | -.06 | .03 | .75* | .21 | -.01 | .18 | .42** | .51** | .16 | .34** | .05 | .24 |

#### Dependent Variables

| 18 | Pre-move attitude | 27.8 | 6.9 | 132 | -.01 | .03 | .04 | .16 | -.23** | .25** | -.10 | -.20* | -.15* | .01 | .29** | .06 | .22** | .33** | .45** | .53** | .87 | .17 | .08 | .32** | .29** | -.25 | -.13 |
| 19 | Post-move attitude | 24.3 | 6.9 | 94 | -.05 | .05 | .09 | -.06 | -.02 | .07 | .15 | .11 | .05 | .07 | .21 | -.02 | .12 | .23** | .18 | .17 | .40** | .13 | .22 | .47** | .43** | -.33** | -.38** |
| 20 | Adjustment difficulty | 0 | 4.4 | 83 | -.01 | -.17 | -.18 | -.04** | -.38** | -.10 | -.05 | -.02 | -.01 | .49 | .02 | .34 | .16 | .30* | -.04 | .18 | -.24 | -.40** | -.21 | -.38** | -.30** | .49** | -.29 | -.35** |

* P<.05  
** P<.01  
1 Correlations for number of overseas and domestic moves are within the subgroups making each type of move.
TABLE 3
Hierarchical Regressions with Sets of Predictors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable: Pre-Move Attitude</th>
<th>N = 110</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>Change in R²</th>
<th>F change</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Ratio Preferred</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time in Location</td>
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<td>Pre-Move Community Satisfaction</td>
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<td>Step 3</td>
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<td>Expected Advancement</td>
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<td>Expected Friends</td>
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<td>What to Expect</td>
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<td>Role Ambiguity**</td>
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<td>.66</td>
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<td>4.81**</td>
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* significance of beta in final equation with all variables entered.
* p<.05
** p<.01
DISCUSSION PAPER 1

"Auditors Probabilistic Reasoning in a Multi-Stage Risk Assessment Task"
T. Mock, A. Wright, M. Washington and G. Krishnamoorthy .................................................. July '90

DISCUSSION PAPER 2

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Hume Winzar and R. Morley.................................................................July '90

DISCUSSION PAPER 3

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Ray Byron .................................................................July '90

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DISCUSSION PAPER 5

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DISCUSSION PAPER 6

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DISCUSSION PAPER 8

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DISCUSSION PAPER 9

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DISCUSSION PAPER 10

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DISCUSSION PAPER 11

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DISCUSSION PAPER 12

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