Stress and Turnover Intents in International Organizations: Social Support and Work Life Balance as Resources.

Reference:

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Abstract:

This study investigates whether work opportunities have an impact on stress and the related turnover intentions of employees working in intergovernmental international organizations. It contextualizes the job resources and demands model within international organizations' specific work conditions. The empirical test is based on original data from a survey administered in four major organizations of the United Nations system. Results demonstrate that social work opportunities and work-life balance are organizational levers reducing stress and willingness to quit for employees who are facing red tape or the stresses of being an expatriate. In this context, the relationships between these work opportunities and turnover intention are partially mediated by stress. Contextualized HR management propositions are made to help organizations coping with these management challenges.

Keywords: International Organizations; Turnover; Stress; International Civil Servants; Expatriates; Job Demands-Resources Model

Introduction

Challenges of human resources management in international organizations (IOs) are not sufficiently addressed (Toomey & Brewster, 2008), particularly as compared to the work done

on public and private sectors' organizations. It appears as if the employees of the United Nation system as a global employer have been somewhat neglected so far by the developments of the international HRM perspective (Brewster, 2007; Brewster, Sparrow, & Harris, 2005; Toomey & Brewster, 2008), while ample evidence is available on public and private employees' satisfaction with different work features (Bullock et al., 2015). To tackle this research gap, we investigate factors of stress and turnover intention among a sample of international civil servants in four UN organizations: the Universal Postal Union (UPU), the International Telecom Union (ITU), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Even if the different categories of international civil servants face notable variations in role and influence (Weller & Yi-Chong, 2015, p. 12), they may be regarded as an occupational group with a high regard for their privileged status, at least in the EU context (Hensell, 2016). They can be labeled as "internationalists" who have an open mind towards staff cultural diversity, and who have accepted mobility and expatriation requirements and their respective impact on family life, as defining traits of an international career (Toomey & Brewster, 2008). Benefitting from favorable employment conditions, they pursue a career in a highly politicized environment (Sharma & Banerjee, 2009) and experience multiple loyalties (Mele et al., 2016). These professionals, particularly ones in the the humanitarian and aid domains, often have to operate in an increasingly life-threatening context (Duffield, 2012) that can easily become detrimental to, at the very least, their mental health (De Waal, 2010; Harrell-Bond, 2002). In the meantime the various organizations of the UN system are confronted with budget cuts and mission reconfigurations, while the demand to intervene is ever-increasing (Bauer & Knill, 2007; Missoni & Alesani, 2013). Consequently, these organizations and their staff face pressures and complex challenges with regard to efficiency orientation, global service provision, and localization of decision-making (Brewster, 2007; Davies & Woodward, 2014).

This study is innovative because it connects the literature on stress and turnover intention to research on HRM practices and their respective effects on organizational performance (Van De Voorde et al., 2012). It investigates which work opportunities are stressful and increase intent to leave. This perspective has practical implications for strategic HRM, as these undesirable work outcomes are associated with lower organizational performance and increasing costs

(recruitment, training, a loss of precious knowledge and competencies) (Steel & Lounsbury, 2009)[1].

The reminder of the article is structured as follows. It begins with a presentation of the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) as the frame upon which contextualized and detailed research hypotheses based on specific IO features are developed. In the methods section we discuss the setup and sample of our study. Following this, we present the results and report on the testing of our hypotheses. A fourth section is dedicated to the discussion and implications of our research findings. The concluding section identifies the strategic HRM challenges for International Organizations.

A Contextualized Job Demands-Resources Model for IO Employees

The fulfillment of particular needs related to work may contribute to support or impair employees' wellbeing and lead to the development of undesirable work outcomes such as higher levels of stress or poorer performance (Sullivan & Bhagat, 1992). The JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) allows for a precise identification and classification of work characteristics into two higher-order opposing categories. On the one hand, "job demands are defined as those aspects of the work context that tax employees' personal capacities and are, therefore, associated with certain psychological and/or physiological costs" (Van den Broeck et al., 2008: 278). Work overload, organizational constraints, emotional demands, work-home conflict, and interpersonal conflict are job demand factors proven to be strongly related to stress if they exceed employees' adaptive capacities (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Accordingly, stress at work and the willingness to quit job arise when employees' expectations in these matter are not satisfied.

On the other hand, "the category of job resources is defined as those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the work context that (1) reduce the health impairing impact of job demands, (2) are functional in achieving work goals, and (3) stimulate personal growth, development, and learning" (Van den Broeck et al., 2008: 278). Opportunities for skill utilization, supervisor support, colleague support, financial rewards, career opportunities, team cohesion, autonomy, and coaching opportunities are the main aspects identified as resources that enable employees to work in a healthy atmosphere (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). According

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[1] However, the argument can be made that United Nations organizations, by developing an overinvestment employment relationship, according to (Tsui et al., 1997), suffer from inefficiently low turnover rate. The authors would like to sincerely thank the reviewer who suggested this reference, and argument.

to the terminology of the self-determination theory (Gagné & Deci, 2005) the fulfillment of extrinsic job opportunities (i.e. compensation package, satisfaction towards income, pay raises, benefits), intrinsic job opportunities (i.e. meaningfulness, work responsibility, autonomy, use of skills), and social work opportunities (i.e. work atmosphere among co-workers, or with supervisors) are central resources to reduce stress perception.

By the same token, a better understanding on the mechanisms leading to turnover intention is crucial for practitioners. It allows them to assess the effectiveness of their HRM policies, and to identify the factors that, besides stress (Fang & Baba, 1993; Steel & Lounsbury, 2009), contribute to higher levels of turnover intention (Caillier, 2016). Recent comprehensive results indicate that aside from a lack of a better alternative, the principal factors leading to employee retention are a high level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.On the contrary, dissatisfaction with regard to the poor quality of the leadership, a low level of perceive distributive justice, low promotional chances, or poor work group cohesion and degree of autonomy, are all characteristics of the work environment that induce turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000). Having set the general frame, we can now develop contextualized hypotheses applied to the IOs work context.

Job Resources in IOs

In the IOs context, extrinsic work opportunities or the material conditions in which work is performed, have a particular meaning. They were devised to ensure a high degree of loyalty, neutrality, and integrity of all international civil servants, as referred to in the UN Charter (art. 101(3), United Nations, 1945). To attract and retain highly skilled professionals IOs offer high salaries (often untaxed), important benefits (health insurance, good retirement plans) and compensation packages, and other similar advantages for fieldwork abroad or relocation (Haynes, 2008). These features that are extrinsic, in the sense as they are not directly related to the job itself, are also crucial levers for managing expatriates and their adjustment process (Bonache et al., 2001). Salary is often higher in IOs than in national governments (except for the highly developed countries), while at the same time benefits seem to be lower than in private multinational companies of comparative size (Coicaud, 2008). On this basis, we can expect that employees who are not satisfied with these work aspects will be more likely to develop stress and the intent to leave. Therefore it is hypothesized that: *Satisfaction with extrinsic work opportunities (EWO) leads to lower levels of stress perception (SP) and turnover intention (H1).*

The importance of the missions and specific goals delegated to IOs and, more specifically, the high degree of competence required to fulfill them are defining intrinsic aspects of work in IOs that are likely to attract well-trained professionals greatly interested in and challenged by the very nature of their jobs. Empirically, in 2009 the International Civil Service Commission provided results from a system-wide assessment (more than 15'000 employees surveyed), showing that the first reason for which international staff join the UN system is related to how interesting the work is to them, and their expectation that their skills and competencies will be appropriately used (International Civil Service Commission, 2009). Keeping in mind how much these elements are valued by IOs staff members, we can formulate a second hypothesis: *Satisfaction with intrinsic work opportunities (IWO) leads to lower levels of SP and turnover intention (H2).*

The fair representation of all member states among staff is one of the pillars of the United Nations' legitimacy. As a consequence, its workforce is culturally diverse. This specificity is attractive for future employees (International Civil Service Commission, 2009). However, in cross-cultural management, it is generally accepted that culturally diverse teams can be particularly challenging in terms of group cohesion, communication, and leadership or shared principles of action (Gelfand et al., 2007). And this is also the case among the UN workforce (Annan, 1988). As work in culturally diverse teams could be particularly destabilizing and stressful, employee's fulfillment with social work opportunities is even more important in the IOs context. Accordingly, a third hypothesis is formulated: *Satisfaction with social work opportunities (SWO) leads to lower levels of SP and turnover intention (H3).*

Most people enter the UN system motivated by the desire to make a difference and to contribute to important and prestigious societal issues. "Serving a cause they believe in" is the second reason why staff members have decided to join the UN system, and the primary one for staying (International Civil Service Commission, 2009). Poverty eradication, the promotion of social justice or peace through international cooperation and economic development, and human rights advocacy are among idealistic goals pursued. These work opportunities can be distinguished further into altruistic and prestige categories of work motives. Altruistic motives were extensively analyzed as part of the Public Service Motivation (PSM) approach (Perry & Wise, 1990). Such motives are often more prevalent among non-profit workers as compared to government employees (Taylor, 2010). This is also the case for international civil servants of the European Commission (Ban & Vandenabeele, 2009) or of UN agencies (Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2013). They have delegated mandates to solve global policy problems in various domains

that include social, economic, humanitarian, ecological, and cooperation issues. Consequently, the fulfillment of these missions requires from employees a genuine inclination for a pro-social work orientation that is directed towards global problem solving. Along the same line of reasoning, it was also empirically demonstrated that expatriates report higher motivation levels and lower level of stress, as well as lower level of turnover intention if they can make a difference in the world through their work (Silbiger & Pines, 2014, p. 1172). For these reasons, it is expected that employees who can realize their pro-social inclination in their current work setting will be less likely to feel stressed and to leave their organizations. The fourth hypothesis reads as: *Satisfaction with altruistic work opportunities (AWO) leads to lower levels of SP and turnover intention (H4).*

In addition, prestige is also an important work value in general (Ros et al., 1999), and among expatriates in particular (Silbiger & Pines, 2014). IOs being organizations that are imbued with prestige (Kunz, 1947), it is very likely that their employees might be attracted by the status and associated social rank conferred by working for them (Hensell, 2016), and this may hold particularly true for nationals of developing countries (Salomons, 2004). Furthermore, expatriation can be seen as a symbol of high status and career achievement (Silbiger & Pines, 2014). With regard to the high degree of societal importance of the missions that intergovernmental IOs deal with, as well as the IOs employee's valorization of this work feature, we expect that employees who meet these expectations will be less likely to face stress and thus want to leave their organization. A fifth hypothesis can be developed according to above considerations: *Satisfaction with prestigious work opportunities (PWO) decreases SP and turnover intentions (H5).*

The international civil service is composed of two main categories of staff members. General Service staff and National Officer usually work in their home country, while the Professional and Directions categories are mostly composed of an expatriate transnational elite subject to increased mobility and flexibility requirements according to the rotation principle (periods in the field of operation, period in the headquarters) (Botham-Edighoffer, 2006). When employees are facing mobility requirements, work-life balance plays a crucial as a job resource to decrease negative work outcomes. This supporting effect was empirically demonstrated for expatriated employees (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001) or humanitarian aid workers (Cardozo et al., 2012; Eriksson et al., 2009). In these contexts, supporting work-life balance programs are critical

factors facilitating the adjustment[2] in a new work setting characterized by cultural distance (Dabic et al., 2015). Therefore, employees who manage to conciliate work and family requirements are less inclined to be stressed and to want to quit their organization. Accordingly, the sixth hypothesis stipulates that: *Satisfaction with work opportunities encouraging work-life balance (WLBO) leads to lower levels of SP and turnover intention (H6).*

Job Demands in IOs

The literature mentions numerous job demands factors, but only few studies integrate red tape perception as a job demand (Giauque, Anderfuhren-Biget, & Varone, 2013). Developed in public management research, this concept characterizes the burdensome rules and procedures that unnecessarily constrain and regulate the activities of (international) public servants. For public employees, dissatisfaction with red tape is a major reason to leave an organization (Brewer & Walker, 2010), as well as a cause for a lack of motivation or work satisfaction (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007), stress (Giauque, Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2013) and resignation (Giauque et al., 2012). On the other hand, IOs are highly bureaucratized (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004; Trondal, 2011), and their staff members are frustrated by an ever-increasing complexity of their daily tasks caused by New Public Management-like reforms (Botham-Edighoffer, 2006). This brings us to the seventh hypothesis: *Dissatisfaction with red tape leads to higher SP and turnover intention (H7).*

There is a lack of contextualized research on not-for-profit and intergovernmental organization's workers, as research on the relation between expatriation status and stress has particularly been centered on multinational corporations (Dabic et al., 2015). However, studies on humanitarian aid and development professionals show that detrimental work conditions leading to high levels of stress is common knowledge (Connorton et al., 2012), particularly in relation to perilous situations in which they operate (Duffield, 2012). And while organizational support is crucial to mitigate such stress (Eriksson et al., 2009), few employers in the industry provide sufficient or relevant support (Ehrenreich & Elliott, 2004). In any case, working abroad is a stressful situation requiring from the employee an adjustment to a new work context and culture (Silbiger & Pines, 2014; Takeuchi et al., 2005), and this is the case even if the internalization of these requirements seems to be part of the UN staff member professional

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[2] In the literature on expatriates : « adjustment is conceptualized as the degree of fit between the expatriate manager and the new environment in both work and non-work domains. Such a fit is marked by reduced conflict and stress and increased effectiveness » (Aycan, 1997).

identity (Toomey & Brewster, 2008). Accordingly, the eighth hypothesis reads as: *Expatriated employees have higher levels of SP and turnover intention (H8).*

Intergovernmental IOs have the particularity of being complex organizations made up of several physical localizations (headquarters, regional and national offices, field missions) (Davies & Woodward, 2014; Schemeil, 2013). Highly politicized activities take place in headquarters (Sharma & Banerjee, 2009; Weiss, 2012); this might constitute a particularly stressful work environment. However, aid and humanitarian workers operating in the field, because of the life threatening and precarious work condition they face, are known to experience a widest range of mental health, stress at work being the least harmful (Connorton et al., 2012; Ehrenreich & Elliott, 2004). Therefore, field missions appear to be work conditions that are more likely to induce stress than office work, even in a highly politicized environment. This brings us to a new hypothesis: *Employees working in the field have higher levels of SP and turnover intention (H9).*

Mediation Effect of Stress Perception

When stress and exhaustion have been experienced, employees do not have many options. Either they find ways to cope with it, or they leave the impairing situation. Accordingly, stress perception is strongly associated with willingness to leave the organization (Van den Broeck et al., 2008). In addition, the relation between specific job demands/resources and turnover intentions is frequently mediated by stress (Bakker et al., 2008; Bright, 2008; Giauque et al., 2013). The lack of satisfaction with job resources may be linked to turnover intention and this relationship may be mediated by stress perception. We postulate thus: *Stress mediates the relationship between job demands/resources and turnover intentions (H10).*

*****Insert Figure 1 about here*****

Methodology

Sample and data collection

This study relies on original data collected at the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the International Telecom Union (ITU) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU). The first two operate in the humanitarian domain (OHCHR in human rights advocacy and the UNHCR by providing operational support cases of emergency crises), while ITU and UPU are rather technical and normative

organizations. Besides the sector in which they operate, the size and localization of these organizations also differ. If the UNHCR (headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland) employs more than 7'700 permanent staff members (80% deployed in the field), the OHCHR is smaller (about 1'100 employees at the time of the data collection), and most of its work occurs in headquarters located in Geneva and New York, and in several country or regional offices. UPU, the oldest intergovernmental organization (located in Bern, Switzerland), is one of the smallest universal IOs (about 250 staff members). As UPU is the principal forum for the international regulation of the postal sector, most of its activities deal with technological and market challenges faced by the industry and aim at improving postal sector in less developed countries. Finally, the ITU is a particular case of technical intergovernmental IO as it is based on a unique public-private partnership (more than 800 private entities operating in the information and communications technologies industry are part of its membership). The 700 staff members located in the Geneva headquarters pursue its mandate to create a seamless global communications system by, among others, brokering agreements on technologies and services and the allocation of global resources like radio-frequency spectrum and satellite orbital frequencies.

After we obtained the consent of the general directions and HR departments, a web-based survey was made available to all categories of staff members. Individual respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, encouraged to participate, and assured of its confidentiality. After three weeks, a reminder was sent to increase participation. At the end of this process, 1769 valid questionnaires were returned. Depending on the capacity of the HR department to involve staff members in the research and on the degree of decentralization, response rates ranged from acceptable to very good. In details, of the 7'700 or so UNHCR employees having received our questionnaire 14% responded, 24,5% for ITU (734 invitations to the survey were sent), 35 % for OHCHR (1'168 staff members having received the invitation) and 44% for UPU where the 256 staff members have received our questionnaire. To treat appropriately the missing values, our regression models use the pairwise deletion method. Table 1 below recapitulates the socio-demographic characteristics of the surveyed population. According to the data provided by the participating HR services, the survey samples collected accurately represent the staff characteristics of each organization. However, it should be noted that we observed a slight overrepresentation of younger employees and entry-level professional staff members (P1-P3) at ITU, professionals (P1-P5) at UPU and higher categories (P1-P5 and D) and women at UNHCR where general service staff (G) are slightly underrepresented.

Insert Table 1 about here

Measures

The empirical measurements of our model's variables consist for the most part of several items taken from attested scales. Stress was measured with 7 items developed by Cook and colleagues (Cook et al., 1981, p. 103), and turnover intentions with one that was found to be highly reliable in previous studies (Bright, 2008). EWO, IWO and SWO use items adapted from the work of Spector (1985; 1994) and from Daley and Vasu (2005). AWO is a contextualized version of the Public Service Motivation scale as developed in studies by Perry (1996) and Kim (2009), and Red Tape is captured with two items adapted from Wright's study (Wright, 2004). The WLBO and the PWO item were self-developed for the purpose of this study. Factor and reliability analyses (Cronbach's Alpha) were carried out. Internal reliability of all scales except for Red Tape is very good (above .800) (Appendix 2). Finally, gender, grade, educational level, organizational tenure, and age, were controlled for and constitute the baseline model. Appendix 1 presents all the details pertaining to the scales used and their related items.

Statistical Procedures

Tolerance and VIF scores were used to test the condition of the dataset (assumptions of normality are upheld, and multicollinearity does not seem to be an issue). To test the hypotheses we performed ordinary least square (OLS) regression analysis using SPSS 21. The mediating effect of stress perception was assessed according to Baron and Kenny's standards (1986). "These rules state that mediation is shown when: a) there are significant correlations between the independent variable and the presumed mediator (path a); b) the presumed mediator affects the dependent variable (path b); c) differences in the independent variable are significantly related to differences in the dependent variable (path c); and finally, when path a and path b are controlled, the previously significant relationship between independent and dependent variable (path c) vanishes" (Schott & Pronk, 2014, p. 14). However, as complete mediation is unlikely to occur in this kind of research we use the "Sobel test" (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2001) and a Z-score > 1.95 as cutoff criteria to indicate partial mediation.

Empirical findings

First we observe a strong correlation between turnover intention and stress perception (r = .420; p < .000) (displayed in Appendix 2). Mediation effects have thus to be taken into account (path b) (H10). We also note that respondents who declared a higher level of turnover intention

belong to the upper grade of the hierarchy and benefit from higher education, or are expatriates. On the contrary, local employees were less prone to leave the IO they work for. With respect to stress, people who declared higher levels were predominantly males who occupied higher levels in the hierarchy, had rather long organizational tenure, benefitted from high educational levels, and were expatriates.

When taking into account job-demands and job-resources (Table 2, Model 2), the effect of educational levels becomes significant. So if organizational tenure can be considered as a factor of stress in any case (Org. Tenure; r= .133; p< .05), employees with higher education are less likely to be affected by stress (Educational level; r= -.110; p< .05) only when specific detrimental work situations occur. Being expatriated (r = .114; p < .05) or suffering from unnecessary bureaucratic constraints (r= .151; p< .01) induce, as expected in H7 and H8, stress perception. By contrast, a high level of satisfaction with supervisor and team support (SWO; r = -.222; p < .000) and with work-life balance (WLBO; r = -.232; p < .000) clearly stand out as having the potential to reduce stress perception (H3 and H6). Conversely, the satisfaction with extrinsic (H1), intrinsic (H2), altruistic (H4) or prestigious (H5) work opportunities, as well as working mostly in field missions, doesn't have any significant impact on stress perception. The analysis shows that slightly more than 26% of stress can be explained by the factors included in the model (adj. R^2 = .263).

*****Insert Table 2 about here*****

Results for turnover intention (path c, Table 3) show that with the exception of age (r= -.138; p< .05) none of the individual characteristics controlled for are significantly related to it (Model 2). On the contrary, employees who consider working for a prestigious organization (PWO; r = -.154; p < .01), who report having positive relations with their colleagues and supervisors (SWO; r = -.215; p < .000), and who manage to reconcile their personal and professional demands (WLBO; r = -.215; p < .000) are less likely to want to quit the organization they work for, as expected in H5, H3, and H6. The variables entered in this analysis (Model 2) explain approximately 24% (adj. R^2 = .241) of the variation of turnover intention.

*****Insert Table 3 about here*****

Following mediation analysis standards, only the independent variables that are significantly related to both stress and turnover intention (i.e. SWO; WLBO) are included in the mediation model. The inclusion of stress clearly reduces the effect of SWO and WLBO on turnover intention (Table 4). And according to the results of the Sobel test, stress partially mediates the

relationship between SWO (Z = -3.57; p < .000) and WLBO (Z = -5.42; p < .000) and turnover intention (Table 5).

Insert Table 4 about here

Insert Table 5 about here

Discussion and methodological limitations

Social support and work-life balance are beneficial job resources that significantly reduce stress (path a). This finding confirms previous research in private and public organizations (Barney & Elias, 2010; Karasek & Theorell, 1990), as well as in international non-governmental organizations (Cardozo et al., 2012). It also gives support to the literature on expatriates - who are more likely to feel stressed. Satisfaction with family adjustment is a real concern for expatriates, and this raises the necessity of developing appropriate HRM policies (Ehrenreich & Elliott, 2004; Silbiger & Pines, 2014). On the other hand, being unsatisfied by a high level of red tape is another major sources of stress for IOs employees. This latter finding is in line with the literature, and confirms the negative effect of red tape on employees' wellbeing and motivation (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007). In addition, stress is clearly related to turnover intention (path b) confirming the detrimental effect of stress on organizational commitment and engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). However, neither extrinsic nor intrinsic work attributes are significantly related to stress perception, thus disconfirming our theorecticla expectation. This contradicts previous research in public administration literature showing associations between intrinsic and extrinsic work attributes with positive work-related outcomes, for instance job satisfaction or performance (Giauque et al., 2013a; Taylor & Westover, 2011). Results are on the same line for altruistic work opportunities, as research has shown the relation between this category of job motives and values and positive job outcomes (Taylor, 2010). This particular result calls for further research to address the complex relation between stress and values at work. IOs, in this respect, could be different than national public administrations.

**** Insert Table 6 about here ***

The empirical evidence shows that social support, work-life balance, and prestige work-related attributes have the capacity to hinder turnover intention (path c). The satisfaction with work-life balance or with coworkers and leadership are known to have a positive effect on staff retention (Griffeth et al., 2000). But the results of prestigious work opportunities lend support

to the idea that organizational status and prestige are defining feature of these IOs (Hensell, 2016). IOs' staff possesses distinctive features helping create a particular status group with material privileges, a sense of solidarity, and often a separate lifestyle characterized by quasi-diplomatic status, separate schooling for their children, and influence conferred by the high status of their positions. In fact, most UN organizations have a kind of overinvestment employment relationship (Tsui, Pearce et al., 1997) that entraps employees in a confortable golden cage and induces lowest turnover rates, regardless the level of organizational hierarchy. The relationship between social support and work life balance and turnover intention is partially mediated by stress. These two sets of work opportunities are the main factors that mitigate negative work-related outcomes. Moreover, they help decrease intention to leave by reducing perceived stress. These results give support to recent findings showing that organizational support is crucial to deal with stress and turnover intention among expatriates (Varma & Russell, 2016).

As is the case with all research, this study encountered several limitations, and the use of cross-sectional data collected at one point in time raises the concern of common method bias that artificially inflates the correlations among the independent (interaction effects) and with dependent variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This results from a trade-off between the scientific standard and the research constraints of collecting data in these organizations. It took us almost a year to negotiate with the HR and Directions offices to be able to proceed with this research. We should have asked them to proceed in two waves, but as a result of the ensuing complications and investment required from their part we preferred to maximize our chances to, at least, collect data at one point of time (several organizations contacted having withdrawn themselves from the study for internal reasons). It would also be of great interest to apply a more mixed-method design, and to complete the statistical survey with a qualitative investigation so as to better understand the meaning that the employees give to their working experiences, and their feeling on whether they are satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Such a strategy has proven its capacity to interpret and understand unexpected results about conflict of interests (Mele et al., 2016).

Conclusions

This article examines the link between different kinds of work opportunities and perceived stress, as well as turnover intention among staff members working in four IOs of the United Nations system. This study offers several contributions. First, it uses primary data about the

work attitudes of IOs' staff members belonging to the United Nations system. In doing so, it contributes both to advancing the knowledge about them and to their inclusion in wider academic discussions on strategic HR management in general and wellbeing at work in particular. The results reveal that social support and work-life balance reduce both stress perception and turnover intention, whereas the feeling of having a prestigious work impacts only the latter. Red tape and expatriation status have detrimental effect on stress perception. Secondly, the study applies the JD-R model in IOs allowing cross comparisons with private organizations or public administrations (Bakker et al., 2010). Therein, our findings confirm that social support and work-life balance are important resources to cope with stress and deal with turnover intention in IOs as well as in private or public organizations, while the feeling of having a prestigious workplace is found to be a specific resource related to IOs' peculiarities so as to mitigate turnover intention. Therefore, this article identifies a need for further research to disentangle the differentiated effects of HRM practices or work opportunities depending on the work context.

This study has shown that HRM tools focusing on extrinsic and intrinsic work opportunities apparently have no significant impact on stress perception. This puzzling finding, which is at odds with many previous research (Bright, 2009; Bullock, 2015), might be related to the fact that our empirical analysis did not distinguish among types of IOs' employees. Indeed, Lepak and Snell (2002) have suggested that the strategic value and uniqueness of human capital vary significantly among employees groups. Some employees possess highly specialized knowledge and capabilities, and are thus crucial for organizational effectiveness and efficiency, whereas others have only generic skills that are less valuable and easily substitutable. Accordingly, organizations develop specific HRM policies to strategically manage different HR configurations. For instance, organizations "are likely to rely on a knowledge-based employment mode that focuses on internal development and long-term employee commitment for their core employees" (Lepak and Snell 2002, p. 520). It is obviously very important for IOs to attract and retain these talents. By constrast, IOs will tend to reduce employements costs and increase flexibility (e.g. through contract job and outsourcing) for workers with widely available skills, since it matters less if they quit their job (Lepak and Snell, 1999). The pardoxal situation here is that even if these employees experience stress and could thus have an intention to leave, they are probably not able to do so (see the golden cage argument presented above; Tsui, Pearce et al., 1997). In a nutshell, it would be worth assessing whether different IOs have developed and implemented HRM policies which have strategically focused on employees'

types, beyond the classical distinctions among Headquarters and Field world, or among local workers and expatriates. In addition, upcoming studies could investigate the extent to which this strategic HRM practices influence the employees long-term commitment toward the organization versus their intention to leave and, eventually, their organizational performance versus resignation at wok (Giauque et al. 2012). Of course, a longitudinal research design would be required to capture these complex causal relationships.

Finally, this article proposes some practical considerations to help overcome stress and turnover intention that are detrimental to organizational efficiency and effectiveness, by implying loss of expertise and cost of renewal. Two opposite views compete in the literature on strategic HRM practices. From the mutual gain perspective, some practices are beneficial to both organizational performance and employees' wellbeing; while from the conflicting outcome perspective, those that support organizational performance are detrimental to the employees' wellbeing (Van De Voorde et al., 2012). The findings related to our study can hardly support either, as we do not measure organizational performance. Our results show that predictors of stress and turnover intention seem to be specific. Future research must carefully scrutinize differential effects of HRM practices on employee wellbeing, as only some of them may play a beneficial role when it comes to deal with stress. On the other hand, HR managers should consider the facilitation of work-family adjustment and the development of a positive relational climate as both might contribute to reduce stress and decrease turnover intention. Besides creating an organizational culture enabling employees to work confidently, they should consider focusing their attention on the development of concrete services to support the family adjustment of expatriates. Finally, managers should consider how they endorse new public management reforms (Bauer & Knill, 2007), as they potentially hinder the organization's capacity to efficiently fulfill its mandate by creating overburdening oversight mechanisms (Grigorescu, 2010) and a counterproductive and unnecessary bureaucratization of the system (Natsios, 2010).

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Figures, Tables and Appendix:

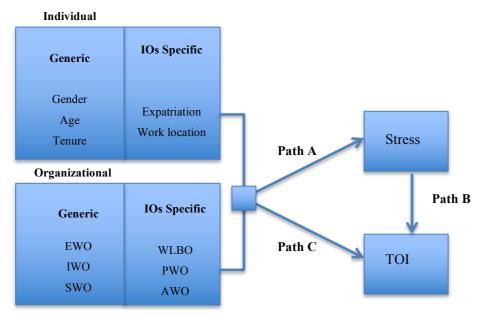Figure 1: conceptual model and relationships between variables

Table 1: Description of the sample

Sex*	Type of IO
Men: 497 (46.8%)	Humanitarian: 1459 (83.1%)
Women: 564 (53.2%)	Technical: 296 (16.9%)

Age Categories**	Origin***
19-29: 78 (8.6%)	Africa: 167 (17.4%)
30-39: 295 (32.4%)	Asia-Pacific: 210 (21.9 %)
40-49: 309 (33.9%)	Eastern Europe: 93 (9.7%)
50-59: 215 (23.6%)	Latin America and Caribbean: 65 (6.8%)
60-62: 12 (1.3%)	Western Europe and Others: 424 (44.2%)
63-65: 2 (0.2%)	

Average Organizational Tenure	Employment Categories
9.5 years	Paid employees: 1728 (97.7%)
	Interns/volunteers: 41 (2.3%)

N=1769, * 60%, resp. ** 51.5%, *** 54.2% answered the question

Table 2: Hierarchical regression analyses for variables predicting stress (path a)

			Model 1	Model 2
			B **(Std. Error)**	**B** **(Std. Error)**
Step 1: Control Variables		**Gender**	.076 (.101)	.061 (.092)
		Grade	.172** (.044)	.075 (.044)
		Org. tenure	.220*** (.008)	.133* (.005)
		Educational level	-.012 (.065)	-.110* (.052)
		Age category	-.112 (-.071)	-.061 (.064)
Step 2: Independent variables		**Work location**		.031 (.077)
		Local-expatriate		.114* (.122)
		EWO		-.119 (.076)
		IWO		.007 (.075)
		AWO		.078 (.064)
		PWO		.056 (.043)
		SWO		-.222*** (.061)
		WLBO		-.232*** (.041)
		Red tape		.151** (.053)
		R2	.068	.292
		R2 change	.068	.225
		F change	5.079***	12.027***
		Adjusted R2	.054	.263
		F statistic	5.079***	10.060***

p<.05 * / p<.01 ** / p<.001 *

Table 3: Hierarchical regression analyses for variables predicting turnover (path c)

		Model 1	Model 2
		B **(Std. Error)**	**B** **(Std. Error)**
Step 1: Control variables	**Gender**	.026 (.126)	-.015 (.144)
	Grade	.126* (.055)	.076 (.055)
	Org. tenure	.131* (.007)	.038 (.009)
	Educational level	.007 (.81)	-.085 (.077)
	Age category	-.190** (.088)	-.138* (.079)
Step 2: Independent variables	**Work location**		-.002 (.094)
	Local-expatriate		-.010 (.151)
	EWO		-.114 (.093)
	IWO		.010 (.092)
	AWO		-.078 (.079)
	PWO		-.154** (.053)
	SWO		-.215*** (.074)
	WLBO		-.215*** (.051)
	Red tape		.058 (.065)
	R2	.033	.271
	R2 change	.033	.237
	F change	2.468	12.582*
	Adjusted R2	.020	.241
	F statistic	2.468	9.227***
p<.05 * / p<.01 ** / p<.001 ***			

Table 4: Mediation model

		Model 1 B (Std. Error)	Model 2 B (Std. Error)
Step 1: Independent variables	SWO	-.364*** (.044)	-.274*** (.046)
	WLBO	-.204*** (.036)	-.126*** (.037)
Step 2: Stress	Stress		.256*** (.049)
	R2	.194	.243
	R2 change	.194	.049
	F change	75.764***	40.917***
	Adjusted R2	.191	.239
	F statistic	75.764***	67.344***
p<.05 * / p<.01 ** / p<.001 ***			

Table 5: Testing partial mediation effects of OC (Sobel test)

	βa	βb	SEa	SEb	Z
SWO	-.222***	.420***	.061	.022	-3.57***
WLBO	-.232***	.420***	.041	.022	-5.42***
p<.05 * / p<.01 ** / p<.001 ***					

Table 6: Summary of the results					
		Hypotheses	**Stress**	**Turnover intention**	**Mediation**
Job-Resources	H1	EWO decrease stress perception and turnover intention			
	H2	IWO decrease stress perception and turnover intention			
	H3	SWO decrease stress perception and turnover intention	**X**	**X**	**X***
	H4	AWO decrease stress perception and turnover intention			
	H5	PWO decrease stress perception and turnover intention		**X**	
	H6	WLBO decrease stress perception and turnover intention	**X**	**X**	**X***
Job-Demands	H7	Red Tape increases stress perception and turnover intention	**X**		
	H8	Expatriation Status increases stress perception and turnover intention	**X**		
	H9	Working in the field increases stress perception and turnover intentions			
		Stress perception increase turnover intention		**X**	
X = Verified					
X*= The relations between SWO and WLBO and turnover intention are partially mediated by stress perception.					

Appendix:

Items used in this research:

Appendix 1: Items used in this research

	Variable name	Measurement details
Control variables	Gender	Male = 1
		Female = 2
	Grade	What is your grade?
		1 = g1-g4
		2 = g5-g7
		3 = p1-p3
		4 = p4-p5
		5 = d1-d2
		6 = > d2
	Organisational tenure	How long have you spent in your current organisation?
	Educational level	What is the highest educational level that you have achieved? Responses coded from 1 (compulsory school) to 7 (PhD)
	Age category	1= 19-29
		2=30-39
		3=40-49
		4=50-59
		5=60-62
		6=63-65
Independent variables	Work location	Where do you spend most of your working time?
		1 = headquarter
		2 = field
		3 = frequent moves among field and headquarter
	Local-expatriate	Are you a local employee or an expatriate?
		1 = local employee
		2 = expatriate
	Extrinsic work opportunities (EWO)	For each of the statements below, please indicate the extent of your satisfaction or dissatisfaction by placing a tick in the appropriate box (1 = not at all satisfied; 5 = totally satisfied):
		- the adequacy of pay for the work done
		- the pay rises
		- the benefits I receive
		- the benefits compared to those of other similar organizations

	- the job security I have
Intrinsic work opportunities (IWO)	For each of the statements below, please indicate the extent of your satisfaction or dissatisfaction by placing a tick in the appropriate box (1 = not at all satisfied; 5 = totally satisfied): - the responsibilities given to employees - the open communication among employees - the provision of training programs for new employees - the proposed training programs - the provision of career improvement training programs
Altruistic work opportunities (AWO)	For each the statements below, indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement by placing a tick in the appropriate box (1 = disagree strongly; 5 = agree strongly): - I am interested in making international programs that contribute to build a better world - Seeing people get benefits from the programs I have been deeply involved in brings me a great deal of satisfaction - I consider my commitment in the international civil service my civic duty - Meaningful international civil service is very important to me - Making a difference for a better world means more to me than personal achievements - I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of the whole world
Prestigious work opportunities (PWO)	For this statement below, please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement (1 = disagree strongly; 5 = agree strongly): In my view, international organizations are the most prestigious organizations to work for
Social work opportunities (SWO)	For each of the statements below, please indicate the extent of your satisfaction or dissatisfaction by placing a tick in the appropriate box (1 = not at all satisfied; 5 = totally satisfied): - my colleagues' competence - the work atmosphere among co-workers - my supervisor's competence - my supervisor's fairness - my supervisor's people skills - my supervisor's likeability
Work-life balance opportunities (WLBO)	For each of the statements below, please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement (1 = completely disagree; 5 = totally agree): - My partner has difficulties to accommodate with the difficulties related to my career in an international organization - It is difficult to raise children without being able to count on my extended family

		- When entering an international organization, my partner had to give up his/her own career - It is a source of stress having to think about how can I organize my childcare - Expatriation is a source of major challenge to balance work and family life
	Red Tape	For each of the statements below, please indicate the extent of your satisfaction or dissatisfaction (1 = not at all satisfied; 5 = totally satisfied): - operating procedures - administrative burden
Dependent variables	Turnover intention	Within the next 2 years, how likely are you to leave your current organization for a job in another organization? (1 = never; 5 = frequently)
	Stress	For each of the statements below, please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement (1 = completely disagree; 5 = totally agree) - My job tends to directly influence my health - I work under a great deal of tension - I have felt fidgety or nervous as a result of my job - If I had a different job, my health would probably improve - Problems associated with my job have kept me awake at night - I have felt nervous before attending a meeting in my organization - I often "take my job with me" in the sense that I think about it when I do other things

Appendix 2: bivariate correlations between the study's variables

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Turnover	1	1															
Stress	2	.420**	1														
Gender	3	-.025	.081*	1													
Grade	4	.095**	.148**	-.013	1												
Org. tenure	5	-.014	.094**	-.046	.086**	1											
Educational level	6	.082*	.102**	-.009	.383**	-.205**	1										
Age category	7	-.061	.029	.100**	.160**	.585**	-.067*	1									
Work location	8	.036	.050	-.120**	.083**	.037	.093**	-.0.75*	1								
Local or expatriates	9	.124**	.210**	-.040	.546**	.072*	.430**	.130**	.021	1							
Extrinsic work opportunities (EWO)	10	-.337**	-.319**	-.034	.005	.033	-.038	.067	-.047	.045	1						
Intrinsic work opportunities (IWO)	11	-.312**	-.280**	-.077*	-.036	.039	-.023	.099**	-.017	.024	.601**	1					
Altruistic work opportunities (AWO)	12	-.176**	-.022	-.038	-.053	-.063	-.001	-.049	.199**	-.088**	.120**	.115**	1				
Prestigious work opportunities (PWO)	13	-.314**	-.140**	-.084**	-.102**	-.057	-.081*	-.078*	.072*	-.130**	.209**	.180**	.353**	1			
Social work opportunities (SWO)	14	-.383**	-.403**	-.053	-.043	-.088**	-.054	-.057	.040	-.055	.447**	.525**	.122**	.230**	1		
Work-life balance work opportunities (WLBO)	15	-.256**	-.343**	.052	-.130**	-.073	-.212**	.024	-.109**	-.299	.188**	.108**	.075	.053	.139**	1	
Red tape	16	.302**	.345**	.075*	.109**	-.049	.142**	-.010	-.048	.168**	-.418**	-.430**	-.085**	-.235**	-.412**	-.175**	1

p<.05 * / p<.01 **