

Testing a Model of Co-op Students' Conversion Intentions

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Abstract

Due to increased competition for talent, employers often look to *convert* co-op employees to full-time hires. The purpose of this paper was to conceptualize and test a model of co-operative education (“co-op”) students’ conversion intentions (i.e., plans to become a full-time member of the organization). Perceived work term quality (learning, impact, and relatedness) is proposed to influence conversion intentions serially through work engagement (feeling of vigor, dedication, and absorption at work) and organizational commitment (strong bond with the employer). The model is tested with data collected from co-op students ($n = 1,364$) at a Canadian university. As predicted, results suggest that perceived work term quality affects conversion intentions both directly and indirectly through work engagement and organizational commitment. This study is the first to examine potential contributions of the perceived quality of co-op students’ work term experiences to students’ plans for becoming a member of the organization. As such, it has important implications for how host organization members such as supervisors can design and deliver co-op work term experiences to leverage the benefits of participating in co-op.

Keywords: work-integrated learning; work term quality; work engagement; organizational commitment; conversion; Canadian

Increasingly employers look to students enrolled in work-integrated learning (WIL) programs such as co-operative education (co-op) to address talent needs. Co-op is a form of education in which students alternate between academic terms and work terms, each lasting typically four months in length (Sattler & Peters, 2013). The work terms are usually paid employment arrangements in which students are expected to be fully integrated members of the organization. It is believed that both students and employers benefit from this arrangement.

Converting Co-op Students

One of the reasons that employers have turned to co-op within a broader talent management strategy is to *convert* students into full-time employees. Often employers participate in co-op to determine which students might make the best organizational members (e.g., Sattler & Peters, 2012). They use the co-op work term to screen students’ talents and develop relationships that promote conversion. If successful, employers can derive significant benefit from converting students to full-time employees (Gerdes, 2009). This may be in part to the cost-savings associated with onboarding students who are already “up to speed” (Dessler, 1999). Of course, employers become involved in co-op for other reasons, such as giving back to the community, but recruitment and conversion outcomes are typically the most

important to employers (Sattler & Peters, 2012).

Previous Conversion Research

There are three main critiques of the previous conversion research. First, to date conversion research has focused on internships (e.g., Hurst, Good, & Gardner, 2012), which differ from co-op in that they are often unpaid and occur typically once during the educational program (compared to multiple times). With multiple work terms in co-op comes the opportunity for exposure to multiple employers. How co-op students navigate these experiences to end up in one position or another is unclear.

Second, previous conversion research has focused on students’ intentions to convert, rather than on the conversion intentions of those students who have received an *offer* of employment. Surely, organizations are interested in the dynamics of conversion only for those students they wish to retain. Thus, a greater focus on conversion intentions in response to a job offer is warranted.

Third, previous conversion research lacks a framework for understanding the process through which the work term experience translates into students’ plans to convert. Studies (e.g., Rose, Teo, & Connell, 2014; Zhao & Liden, 2011) have focused on the role of student-supervisor relationships, and dynamics regarding learning opportunities. Mixed results have been presented, and it remains unclear how such factors actually influence

conversion. The study by Hurst et al. (2012) suggested that feeling connected to the organization is a significant predictor of students' intentions to become full-time employees, yet did not provide insight regarding how students become connected to their employer.

Previous Retention Research

Organizational behaviour research regarding retention provides additional insight into students' conversion intentions. Retention occurs when existing organizational members continue to remain in the organization. Conversion refers to a situation in which the relationship ends for a period of time (e.g., while student returns to an academic term) but then continues at a later time. Thus, the concepts differ in that organizational *insiders* are retained while organizational *outsiders* are converted. Nevertheless, retention research provide a useful perspective on how students might make decisions to join the organization.

Two factors are consistently highlighted as important predictors of retention. The first is the degree to which one's work experience is *engaging*. Engaging experiences are those that promote feelings of vigor (energy), dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Feeling engaged is an important part of why individuals choose to stay in their jobs (Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007; Saks, 2006). Thus, students may be more likely to convert in organizations where they feel engaged and happy with the work that they do. The second factor that promotes employee retention is a strong psychological bond between employee and organization, called *organizational commitment*. Employees are committed to the organization

when they feel a sense of duty or obligation to remain and when they feel a strong emotional attachment to the organization (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Organizational commitment is one of the strongest predictors of employee retention (e.g., Michaels & Spector, 1982; Podsakoff et al., 2007). Collectively, this area of research highlights the importance of creating engaging experiences and student-employer bonds in relation to conversion outcomes.

Present Investigation

Employers often hope to build a talent pipeline, one that identifies talented students and brings those students into the organization. The success of their efforts depends partially on whether students who receive an offer of employment accept that offer and become full-time members of the organization. The goal is to create for students an experience that is engaging and that creates a bond between student and employer. The challenge is to understand *how* the work term can be managed to promote work engagement, organizational commitment, and conversion.

We propose that the key to work engagement and organizational commitment is students' perceptions of the *quality* of their work term. The quality of a work term has been conceptualized as students' perceptions of three aspects of their experience: quantity and quality of learning, impact (e.g., contribution to the organization), and relatedness (connection between the experience and other work and academic experiences) (Drewery, Pretti, & Pennaforte, 2015). Figure 1 presents a conceptual model of this proposition. The purpose of this study is to

test the proposed model. In doing so the study contributes to the literature in two ways. First, it focuses on the conversion phenomenon specifically in a co-op context and for students who have received an offer of employment, both which have been overlooked in previous conversion research. Second, it uses the WIL and organizational behaviour literature to enhance an understanding of how organizations can manage successful outcomes while participating in WIL programs.

Perceived Work Term Quality

The conceptual model presented above focuses on co-op students' perceptions of the *quality* of their work term as the fundamental predictor of conversion intentions. Students report high-quality experiences when they have learned something meaningful, made a positive contribution, and found connections between the experience, their academic pursuits, and potential future work (Drewery et al., 2015). Each of these is discussed briefly below.

Learning. The WIL and experiential education literature fundamentally agree that the purpose of the co-op work term is student *learning*. The degree to which students learn about themselves, the world of work, or the world at large, is the basis on which to assess the quality of co-op experiences (e.g., Smith et al., 2009). Learning about one's job and how to navigate work-related tasks successfully in particular is essential to students' learning at work (Drewery et al., 2015). And yet, WIL experiences vary in the extent to which they offer learning experiences (Dewey, 1938; McRae, 2015). The degree to which students believe that learning has occurred for them seems to be linked

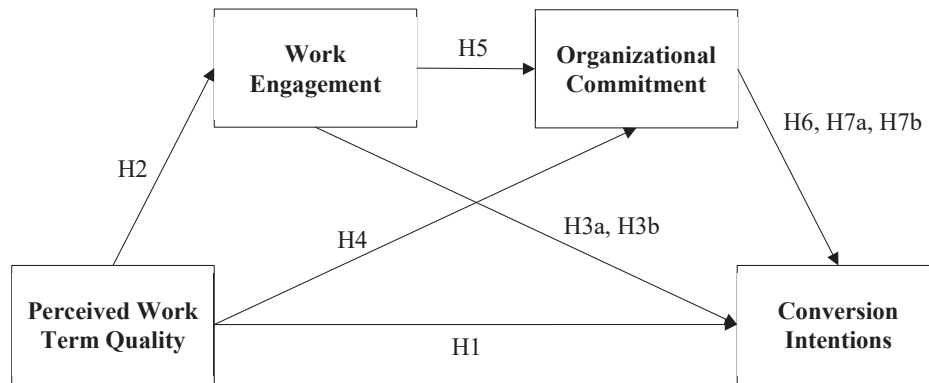


Figure 1. Conceptual model of and hypothesized relationships between co-op students' perceived work term quality, work engagement, organizational commitment, and conversion intentions

to the overall quality of the experience (Drewery et al., 2015).

Impact. In previous research (Apostolides & Looye, 1997; Drewery et al., 2015), students have highlighted a connection between overall perceived work term quality and a sense of *impact*. The best experiences seem to be those in which students felt they contributed, such as to the success of the organization or to improving the wellbeing of others. The co-op literature details several cases in which students made a positive impact on others, especially those within the organization (Braunstein et al., 2011). Hearing from organizational members such as the supervisor that one has “done a good job,” or simply being involved in important moments (e.g., having a voice in decisions) can contribute to a sense of impact.

Relatedness. Relatedness refers to the degree to which the experience was connected to what students had previously learned in their academic pursuits and what students hoped to learn in future experiences (Drewery et al., 2015). A fundamental tenet of experiential education theory is the connection or integration of work and academic experiences (Kolb, 1984). The op-

portunity to apply previous knowledge directly at work is often cited as an important aspect of WIL experiences (e.g., Smith, 2012; Wiseman & Page, 2001). Students hope that the experience will afford them the chance to put into practice what they have learned previously, and they also hope that the work term pays dividends for future employment.

We propose that students' perceptions of the quality of their work terms will impact conversion intentions. This proposition is based on students' motivations for participating in co-op. A key motivation for co-op students is to identify high-quality opportunities for work upon graduation (Sattler & Peters, 2013). They look for organizations that offer meaningful and exciting work. Having a high-quality work experience may trigger the belief that conversion will lead to more beneficial work experiences and thus might influence decisions to accept offers of employment.

H1: Co-op students' perceptions of work term quality will be positively associated with their intentions to convert.

Mediation Effects of Work Engagement

It is proposed that work engagement and organizational commitment jointly mediate the influence of perceived work term quality on conversion intentions. First, it is expected that higher quality work terms are associated with more work engagement. Each aspect of quality may have an important contribution to work engagement. Environments that afford learning opportunities also promote work engagement (Park et al. 2014). Feelings associated with making a difference at work are empowering (Spreitzer, 1995) and may encourage work engagement (e.g., Bhatnagar, 2012; Jose & Mampilly, 2014) and conversion intentions (Bhatnagar, 2012). Co-op students' perceptions of relatedness between academics and work may also promote work engagement (Drewery, Pretti, & Barclay, 2016a). Together, these studies tell us that students' perceptions of the quality of their work term experiences will be linked with their work engagement.

H2: Perceived work term quality will be positively associated with work engagement.

The link between work engagement and conversion is explicated in the organizational behaviour literature. Experiencing work as something that is absorbing, intrinsically pleasing, and energy-inducing promotes retention. Saks (2006) for example showed, using data from a Canadian sample ($n = 102$), that employees' work engagement was negatively associated with their intentions to quit. Based on this research, it is expected that a high-quality work term will be more engaging and therefore will lead to a stronger intention to convert.

The career development literature also suggests that greater work engagement may be linked with stronger intentions to conversion. Engaging work might facilitate conversion because it creates for the student a connection between their interests and a career path. The career engagement model (Pickerell & Neault, 2016) suggests that engaging work experiences might suggest to students a career within their current field is right for them. This belief might manifest in decisions to remain within the field. Likely, this enhances plans to convert for the employer because that employer offers a direct entry point into the field. In this way, more engaging work terms might signal more engaging career opportunities with that particular employer.

H3: Work engagement (a) is positively associated with conversion intentions and (b) mediates the relationship between perceived work term quality and conversion intentions.

Mediation Effects of Organizational Commitment

Our model suggests that organizational commitment also plays an important function in the

relationship between perceived work term quality and conversion intentions. Organizational commitment may mediate the effect of perceived work term quality on conversion intentions in two ways. First, it may explain the link between perceived work term quality and conversion via a social exchange principle (see Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Students who have high-quality work experiences likely attribute their success in part to the organization. Indeed, most organizations invest resources through socialization efforts, mentorship, and coaching to ensure that their students will be successful. Feeling as though the organization has helped to create a successful experience may in turn foster a connection with the organization that results in "paying back" the employer via conversion.

Based in this same line of thinking, organizational commitment may intervene in the path from perceived work term quality to work engagement to conversion. As the quality of the work term increases, so too will students' engagement in their work. Deeper engagement in work has been shown to increase organizational commitment (e.g., Cho, Laschinger, & Wong, 2006; Saks, 2006). As is explained by the dynamics of social exchange, deeper organizational commitment may result in stronger intentions to convert for the employer (e.g., Saks, 2006). Thus, perceived work term quality may promote organizational commitment through work engagement, and it is through this process that students may intend to convert.

H4: Perceived work term quality will be positively associated with organizational commitment.

H5: Work engagement will be positively associated with organizational commitment.

H6: Organizational commitment will be positively associated with conversion intentions.

H7: Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between (a) perceived work term quality and conversion intentions, and (b) the chain of relationships between perceived work term quality, work engagement, and conversion intentions.

Method

Data Collection

Participants ($n = 1,364$) were co-op students who had recently completed a co-op work term experience and who had been offered the opportunity to return to their employer for either a subsequent work term or work after graduation. Participants were enrolled in co-op programs across several faculties (e.g., arts and humanities, science and technology, math and engineering, applied health sciences) on a full-time basis at a research-intensive Canadian university. Participants completed an electronic survey and received nominal remuneration.

Measures

Perceived work term quality. As explained previously, perceived work term quality is comprised of learning, impact, and relatedness. We created a seven-item measure of perceived work term quality. Two items ("I learned how to successfully perform my job in an efficient manner" and "I mastered the required tasks of my job") measured learning, three items ("I was involved in making important decisions," "This organization valued my contribution," and "My supervisor valued my contribution to this organization") measured

impact, and two items (“The tasks I had to do at work were in line with what I really want to do” and “How connected did you feel your work experience was to your academic program?”) measured relatedness. Responses to all items were on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*. The only exception was that participants used a 10-point scale (where 1 = *not at all connected* and 10 = *very connected*, later transformed to a five-point scale) for the second relatedness item. A principle components factor analysis (KMO = .667; Bartlett’s test = 2040.067, $df = 15$, $p < .001$) confirmed that all of these items loaded onto a single factor explaining 41.41% of the total variance. Thus, we obtained an overall perceived work term quality score by calculating the mean of the items (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .703$).

Work engagement. Work engagement was measured using eight items adapted from Schaufeli, et al.’s (2002) Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES). Three items were used to measure absorption (“I was immersed in my work,” “I got carried away when I was working,” and “I felt happy when I was working intensely”), two items were used to measure dedication (“My job inspired me” and “I am proud of the work that I did”), and three items were used to measure vigor (“At my work, I felt bursting with energy,” “In my job, I felt strong and vigorous,” and “When I got up in the morning, I felt like going to work”). Responses were on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. A total work engagement score was obtained by calculating the mean of all the items (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .905$).

Organizational commitment. Organizational commitment was measured using three items (“How committed were you to your company?” “How much did you care about your company?” and “How dedicated were you to your company?”) adapted from Klein, Cooper, Molloy, and Swanson’s (2014) unidimensional measure of commitment. Responses were on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = *not at all* and 5 = *an extreme amount*. An average score was computed for an overall measure of organizational commitment (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .933$).

Conversion intentions. Conversion intentions were measured using two items (“How likely would you be to return to this organization?” and “How likely would you be to accept a full-time job at this company past graduation?”) that were developed for the current study. Responses to each item were on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = *not at all likely* and 5 = *very likely*. The average of both items was taken as an overall conversion intention measure where higher scores indicated a greater likelihood of conversion (Spearman-Brown coefficient = .894).

Individual differences. Several additional measures of participants’ characteristics were taken. These included their age, sex, faculty of study, the number of work terms they had completed (between 1 and 6), whether they had worked for their most recent employer prior to the work term (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*), the size of the team (1 = *mostly alone*, 2 = *1 to 5 employees*, 3 = *more than 5 employees*), and the size of the organization they worked in (1 = *50 or fewer employees*, 2 = *51*

to 100, 3 = *101 to 150*, 4 = *151 to 200*, 5 = *200 or more*).

Analysis Procedure

To test our model, a conditional process regression analysis was conducted using the PROCESS program available in SPSS (see Hayes, 2013). The PROCESS program allows for an estimation of linear regression coefficients in models involving mediation. This affords evaluations of the pathways by which one variable might affect another variable through one or more mediator variables. As our conceptual model proposed that both work engagement and organizational commitment would mediate the influence of perceived work term quality on conversion intentions, the PROCESS program (Model 6; see Hayes, 2013) provided the best approach. Perceived work term quality was entered as the predictor variable, work engagement and organizational commitment were entered as mediators, and conversion intention was the outcome variable. Organization size, number of work terms completed, and previous employment in the organization were entered as control variables. For estimation purposes, the model was estimated with 10,000 bootstrapped samples (see Hayes, 2013).

Results

Sample and Measures

Participants ($n = 1,364$) were roughly 21 years old ($SD = 1.431$) and about half (48.5%) were female. Roughly 71% of participants belonged to faculties where they would primarily study science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Over half (52.3%) of the participants had an academic aver-

age above 80%. They worked mostly in small groups of five or fewer employees (60.6%). Most worked in large (more than 200 employees; 53.5%) organizations and roughly one quarter (26%) worked in small (between one and 50 employees) organizations. Just over one quarter (26.5%) of participants had completed only one work term, one third (37.9%) had completed two or three work terms, and another third (35.5%) completed between four and six work terms. Prior to their most recent work term, most participants (78.2%) had not worked for their employer.

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the variables in the model. Perceived work term quality for the sample was slightly above the midpoint of possible responses ($M = 3.782, SD = .561$) suggesting that the average quality of work terms experienced by participants was somewhat positive overall. Work engagement reported by participants was also above the scale midpoint ($M = 3.515, SD = .760$) suggesting most participants were engaged in their work. Organizational commitment was high ($M = 3.908, SD = .837$). Conversion intention scores were closer to the midpoint of the scale ($M = 3.319, SD = 1.233$) sug-

gesting that intentions to convert varied from weak to strong. Correlations suggest that the core measures in the model (perceived work term quality, work engagement, organizational commitment, and conversion intentions) are all linked. The strongest correlation amongst these variables is between perceived work term quality and engagement ($r = .695, p < .001$) and the weakest is between engagement and conversion intentions ($r = .471, p < .001$).

Results of Hypothesis Tests

Table 2 shows the unstandardized regression coefficients that are relevant to hypotheses made of direct relationships in the conceptual model (H1, H2, H3a, H4, H5, and H6). All these hypothesized relationships were supported after controlling for the number of completed work terms, whether the student had worked for their employer prior to the work term, and the size of the organization. There were significant positive relationships between perceived work term quality and work engagement ($B = .944, SE = .027, p < .001$), perceived work term quality and organizational commitment ($B = .381, SE = .040, p < .001$), and perceived work term quality and conversion intentions ($B = .317, SE$

$= .070, p < .001$). Therefore, perceptions of a higher-quality work term were linked with reports of more engaging work, a stronger psychological bond with the employer, and stronger intentions to convert (H1, H2, and H4 supported). As expected, the results also showed significant relationships between work engagement and organizational commitment ($B = .554, SE = .029, p < .001$), work engagement and conversion intentions ($B = .269, SE = .056, p < .001$), and organizational commitment and conversion intentions ($B = .423, SE = .046, p < .001$) (H3a, H5, and H6 supported).

Table 3 shows the bootstrapped estimated regression results that are relevant to the hypotheses made of indirect (i.e., mediation) relationships in the conceptual model (H3b, H7a, H7b). Estimates for which the confidence intervals do not cross zero are statistically significant (Hayes, 2013). In support of H3b, the results show that there is a significant indirect relationship between perceived work term quality and conversion intentions through work engagement (estimate = .254, $SE = .054$, 95% confidence interval: lower limit = .150, upper limit = .358). The results also support H7a and H7b in that there was a significant indirect effect of perceived

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Pearson Correlations for Constructs in the Conceptual Model ($n = 1,364$)

	Pearson Correlations			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Perceived work term quality	--			
(2) Work engagement	.695***	--		
(3) Organizational commitment	.607***	.680***	--	
(4) Conversion intentions	.450***	.471***	.496***	--
<i>M</i>	3.782	3.515	3.908	3.319
<i>SD</i>	.561	.760	.837	1.233

Note. *** $p < .001$

Table 2

Unstandardized Regression Coefficients for the Relationships between Control Variables, Work Engagement, Organizational Commitment, and Conversion Intentions (n = 1,364)

Variables	Work Engagement		Organizational Commitment		Conversion Intentions	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Number of terms	.013	.010	-.034	** .011	.064	*** .018
Worked previously	-.034	.037	.142	*** .040	.247	*** .069
Organization size	-.006	.009	-.002	.009	.127	*** .016
Perceived WT quality	.944	*** .027	.381	*** .040	.317	*** .070
Work engagement	--	--	.554	*** .029	.269	*** .056
Organization commitment	--	--	--	--	.423	*** .046
	Adj. R ²					
	.485	***	.506	***	.347	***

Note. WT = work term. ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 3

Results of Bootstrapped Estimated Effects for Indirect Relationships in the Conceptual Model

Relationship	estimate	SE	Bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals	
			Lower limit	Upper limit
Indirect through M1	.254	.054	.150	.358
Indirect through M2	.162	.026	.115	.216
Indirect through M1 + M2	.223	.031	.167	.288

Note. M1 = work engagement, M2 = organizational commitment

work term quality on conversion intentions through organizational commitment (estimate = .162, SE = .026, 95% confidence interval: lower limit = .115, upper limit = .216) and jointly or serially through work engagement and organizational commitment (estimate = .223, SE = .031, 95% confidence interval: lower limit = .167, upper limit = .288).

Discussion

Employers increasingly rely on students enrolled in WIL programs such as co-op to fill gaps in the talent pipeline. Understanding the dynamics of how to bring students effectively into the organization is therefore of interest. The purpose of this study was to test a model of co-op students' conversion intentions, or whether they planned to work for their employer again after a co-op work term. Previous research had focused more on reten-

tion for full-time employees or on conversion specifically in internship contexts. Thus, this study contributes to the literature by examining conversion intentions specifically in co-op.

Perceived Work Term Quality and Conversion

The central contribution of this paper is in demonstrating a link between co-op students' perceptions of work term quality and their intentions to convert. Students think about the quality of their experiences with respect to learning, making meaningful contributions to others, and finding connections between academics, work, and future endeavours (Drewery et al., 2015). We reasoned that perceived work term quality would affect plans to return because they signal what future opportunities might be like. Low-quality

work terms signal that the student should look for other employment prospects while high quality ones suggest opportunities for subsequent high-quality experiences. This finding reinforces that there is a link between students' positive experiences and plans for future employment. The more co-op students perceive that they have learned (e.g., how to master their job), have had a positive impact on the organization, and have done something that is connected to their academic program, the more likely the student will return to the organization.

Connecting Quality and Conversion

The results of our analyses further highlight why perceived work term quality might be connected to conversion intentions. This relationship has to do with work

engagement and organizational commitment. Students who reported a higher-quality work term also reported a more engaging experience overall. This affirms previous research that suggested relevant, meaningful, and educational experiences would be highly engaging for co-op students (e.g., Drewery et al., 2016a; Jose & Mampilly, 2014). Conversion intentions were higher for those who had more engaging experiences for two reasons. First, having a more engaging experience might have signaled to students that they would have a more engaging career in their field, and converting for the employer provided an entry point to that career (Pickerell & Neault, 2016). Second, students who had highly engaging experiences formed a psychological bond with their employer which facilitated conversion plans. The employer invested in creating a higher-quality, more engaging experience and in exchange students “invested” in the organization by planning to become a full-time member (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2006). By contrast, students who did not have engaging experiences were likely those who became over-worked and burnt out or who felt bored and under-valued (Pickerell & Neault, 2016). Such experiences are unlikely to build organizational commitment and instead trigger searches for other opportunities (e.g., Drake & Yadama, 1996; Janssen, de Jonge, & Bakker, 1999).

An important contribution of the paper is in understanding students' conversion intentions in response to job offers. While other research (e.g., Hurst et al., 2012) had examined WIL students' plans to return to their employer, no distinction had been made between students in general and the students whom organizations target. We accounted for

this by including in analyses only those students who had received an offer to return, a proxy for the organization's commitment to the student. Under this important condition, the model demonstrates that perceptions of the work term enhance engagement and commitment and in turn also enhance conversion intentions.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this paper are relevant for a variety of employers who want students to accept offers of employment. Our study suggests that efforts to create higher quality work terms, more work engagement, and stronger organizational commitment all serve the end goal of conversion.

Creating a high-quality work term. Drewery and his colleagues (2016b) showed that employers might contribute to high-quality work terms in several ways. In part, it involves creating a culture of learning. Such cultures involve opportunities to make mistakes and actively promote novel exploration (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). When students are brought into an organization that values learning they are not only more likely to learn something important, but they are also given the opportunity to apply that learning in a way that makes an impact. They are also given the freedom to make connections between their work, their academics, and future careers. It is setting up an environment that encourages and rewards learning that may be the key to creating engaging experiences and enhancing conversion rates. Supervisors and team members may therefore be instructed to encourage co-op students to try new things, reflect on their learning, and apply it

in ways that benefit the organization.

Also consistent with the results of our study and with the results presented by Drewery et al. (2016b) is the importance of setting students up for success. Creating a learning culture may not be beneficial without the necessary supports. Thus, organizations might think about what other supports students need. High-quality socialization and training programs that clearly lay out formal (e.g., rules and regulations) and informal (e.g., organizational norms) structures at work may help students to transition successfully, provide them with better understanding of their roles in context, and set them up for better performance (Chao et al., 1994). Given that making a positive impact is of importance, socialization seems key to creating a high-quality experience (Drewery et al., 2016b).

Organizations might mobilize supervisors to create relevant, meaningful, and engaging learning experiences. For example, supervisors might try to discern students' backgrounds and future intentions in order to frame students' work in more meaningful and relevant ways. They need not alter students' core tasks, but rather help students to make connections between what is being done at work and what was learned in the classroom. We have also found, through our own supervisory experiences, that providing students with opportunities to *own* (i.e., manage and complete in a personal way) a project as a side-feature of the work term can be rewarding and create engagement. Providing students with a chance to take control of their work intuitively promotes learning but also seems to help make connections between students' studies and their work.

Creating an engaging experience. The results of this study suggest that creating high-quality work terms is also important for fostering a sense of engagement in co-op students' work. It makes sense that students would be more engaged in work that they find to be relevant, impactful, and full of opportunities to learn. These characteristics are at the heart of work-integrated and experiential education. Presumably those students who are enrolled in WIL programs seek out these attributes in the work terms they have and therefore are more interested, immersed, and engaged in jobs that contain these traits. Thus, taking steps to create a high-quality work term also creates engagement, which our results show enhances conversion outcomes.

Beyond our study, existing research adds that employers might contribute to co-op students' work engagement by empowering them. Empowering students, that is, providing support (e.g., good information, resources to accomplish tasks) and power (both formal and informal) to do their jobs, creates a sense of control and belonging that is connected to engagement (Greco, Laschinger, & Wong, 2006). Supervisors feature prominently in empowering employees, and so employers may direct students' supervisors to empower students. Increasing the job resources (e.g., social support, coaching) and removing job demands (e.g., work pressure, emotional demand) may create a more engaging environment that contributes to several job outcomes including conversion intentions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Creating organizational commitment. Similarly, as employers create relevant, impactful, learning-oriented work, they may

also enhance organizational commitment. The results of this study suggest that employers may be interested in creating positive (i.e., high-quality, engaging) experiences because they foster a psychological bond between co-op student and the organization. In reflecting on how the term has played out, students assess the quality of their relationship with the employer. When they are happy, achieving what they set out to achieve, making a difference, and learning new things, they become more connected to the organization. We reason this is the case because they are "returning the favour" to the employer for creating a successful work term (Saks, 2006). When things go well, there is a stronger bond with the company and therefore less of a reason to leave it. Employers might therefore maximize organizational commitment by highlighting ways in which the term has satisfied salient goals for the student. Supervisors might be instructed to provide opportunities for learning, impact, and relevance that are uniquely tied to the organization. For example, many accounting firms design their own in-house programs that advance the formal and informal knowledge of accounting and actuarial science students. These programs involve mentorship from existing organizational members, informal gatherings, and textbook sharing. All these elements are implemented by the organization in a way that contributes to the quality of the experience and clearly places the employer as being responsible for that quality in the mind of the student.

Limitations and Future Research

While there are several avenues for future research that extend from this study, we wish to

emphasize those pertaining to the quality of co-op students' work term experiences. The research on students' perceptions of the term is surprisingly limited. Additional research across different kinds of WIL contexts could enrich our theoretical understanding of what makes for a high-quality experience. In a related way, the literature would benefit from a thorough development of a valid and reliable instrument to measure perceived work term quality. Creating better assessment tools would provide educators and organizational members alike a useful rubric by which to measure quality so that they may affect change. Organizations, for example, might want to know which socialization practices have the strongest impact on co-op students' perceptions of quality in order to invest resources accordingly. At the same time, educators may want to understand which dimensions of quality are linked with students' learning outcomes to reveal how they might add value to the work term. A tool that could be used across contexts and even across several forms of WIL would be of significant value.

Also, we believe that there is much more work to be done connecting students' perceptions of the quality of their work term experiences and employers' recruitment outcomes. While our study tested one conceptual model, other models with different variables may be viable. For example, our model did not assess the effects of the attractiveness of other jobs on conversion intentions (Hurst et al., 2012). Students in some programs are faced with a wide variety of attractive positions, while some students struggle to find jobs that are desirable. Therefore, identifying the situational or contextual factors that further explain why some students convert while others

do not is relevant to both research and practice.

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