



# Not All Leaving Is Created Equal

## Differentiating the Factors of Organizational and Occupational Turnover Intentions

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**Abstract:** Drawing on social cognitive career theory (SCCT) and the focus–congruence approach, this study examines how organizational and occupational turnover is differently influenced by work-related factors. Using a sample of 2,353 teachers in rural China, results first showed that negative relationships between organization-focused predictors (i.e., leader support, colleague support, and physical resources for work) and organizational turnover intentions were significant. Similarly, the negative relationship between occupation-focused predictors (i.e., occupational satisfaction, salary satisfaction, and occupational choice motivations) and occupational turnover intentions was also significant. Moreover, occupation-focused predictors have a stronger relationship with occupational turnover intentions than organizational turnover intentions, and vice versa. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

**Keywords:** turnover intentions, social cognitive career theory, focus–congruence approach, organizational turnover, occupational turnover

Employee turnover has captured researchers' attention since the beginning of the 20th century (Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012), as it costs organizations heavily in areas such as financial operations (Hom et al., 2012). Employees could make two decisions regarding turnover: to leave the organization (organizational turnover; Hom, 2011) or to leave the occupation (occupational turnover; Fimian, Fastenau, & Thomas, 1988; Lane, Mathews, & Presholdt, 1988). However, scholarship on turnover has largely limited its focus to organizational turnover, leaving unanswered questions about occupational turnover (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). This is a critical void as occupational turnover is correlated with employee retention regarding both organizational and occupational matters (Yousaf, Sanders, & Abbas, 2015).

Moreover, leaving an organization and switching an occupation are considered related but separated processes (Blau, 1985). In general, occupational turnover is much more difficult for individuals than organizational turnover and occurs much less often (Blau, 2007). For example, drawn from US data, turnover patterns of teachers show that every year 7.4% of teachers move to a different school (between 1987 and 2000) but over a lifetime only 7% of teachers move to another occupation (till 2003; Ingersoll, 2003). Treating organizational and occupational turnover as synonymous ignores the potentially different etiologies of these phenomena, because they may have different

individual and/or situational antecedents. As a result, the differentiated relationships of various antecedents with organizational and occupational turnover are unknown. This represents a critical gap in our knowledge. Studying destinations of leaving (different organizations or new occupations) informs researchers about the relevant pre-turnover work attitudes and decision processes contributing to each type of movement (Hom et al., 2012). Thus, providing empirical evidence to substantiate the distinctiveness of organizational and occupational turnover in their nomological networks is much needed.

In addition, although few studies have found that organizational turnover was negatively associated with organizational commitment and that occupational turnover was negatively associated with occupational commitment (Chang, Chi, & Miao, 2007; Yousaf et al., 2015), they mainly treated organizational turnover and occupational turnover as theoretically separated systems and tested it in separated analyses. However, it is also possible that both organizational and occupational turnover are under the influence of the same set of individual and/or situational antecedents but differ in degree of influence. To our knowledge, research considering the quantity difference of antecedents of organizational and occupational turnover is absent from the literature. Thus, to better uncover the relationship between organizational and occupational turnover, drawing from an alternative lens and substantiating

the relative importance of individual and/or situational antecedents are also much needed.

The present study aims to contribute to the understanding of the basis of employees' occupational turnover intentions as distinguished from organizational turnover intentions, as well as to the understanding of the relationship between organizational and occupational turnover. Results of the current investigation could provide the evidence of the distinctiveness between organizational and occupational turnover as well as the resemblance between them, especially regarding work-related antecedents. The sample we used in the current study is from a representative survey of 2,353 primary and junior secondary school teachers in the Gansu Province in the northwestern interior of China. Between 2000 and 2013, the supply of full-time primary school teachers in rural China dropped by 44% (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2000, 2014). Interestingly, two related but distinct turnover problems simultaneously contribute to the teacher shortage in rural China: *teacher migration and teacher attrition* (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2008). Teacher migration occurs when teachers move from rural schools to other places. In contrast, teacher attrition occurs when teachers leave the teaching profession altogether to pursue other lines of work (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005), which can be either other professions in the same school (e.g., staff) or jobs outside (e.g., salesperson). More formally, teacher migration fits the traditional definition of *organizational turnover* (i.e., people leaving organizations, regardless of whether they stay or leave their occupations), whereas teacher attrition is consistent with definitions of *occupational turnover* (i.e., people leaving their occupations, regardless of whether they stay or leave their organizations). Thus, we believe that this large sample of teachers is particularly relevant and appropriate for the study of the relationship between organizational and occupational turnover.

## Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

To understand the relationship between various factors and either organizational or occupational turnover intentions, the *focus-congruence* approach is of particular relevance (Klein, Molloy, & Brinsfield, 2012). The focus-congruence approach suggests that predictors and criteria are more strongly related when they are expressed and measured at the same level of specification and with the same focus (Klein et al., 2012; Smith, 1976). For example, Blau (1985) found a significant negative correlation between organizational commitment and organizational turnover

intentions – but not between organizational commitment and occupational turnover intentions. Alternatively, he found a significant negative correlation between occupational commitment and occupational turnover intentions but not between occupational commitment and organizational turnover intentions. Thus, relationships between congruent foci should be stronger than when foci differ (Klein et al., 2012).

## Identifying Antecedents

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002) predicts that individuals' career choices, including occupational and organizational choices, are influenced by both situational and individual factors. Since leaders and peers are two critical situational factors that influence employees' salience of self-concept orientations (Lord & Brown, 2004), we first propose support from the leader and colleagues as antecedents of turnover intention. Considering that employees within an organization have beliefs on both specific working conditions and the general job and career (James, Hater, Gent, & Bruni, 1978; James & Tetrick, 1986), we also propose two factors regarding employees' perceptions of and attitudes towards working conditions (i.e., salary satisfaction and working environment support), and two factors regarding employees' general attitudes toward their career (i.e., occupational satisfaction and career motivation) as antecedents of turnover intentions.

Because the purpose of this study is not to identify new predictors of organizational or occupational turnover intentions, but rather to differentiate the most predictive and impactful antecedents of each type of turnover intentions, the predictors in this study have appeared in previous research and meta-analyses (e.g., Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000; Maertz & Griffeth, 2004; Woo & Maertz, 2012). Based on the focus-congruence approach (Klein, et al, 2012), we propose that factors with an organizational focus (e.g., leader support, colleague support, and working environment) would be more strongly related to organizational than occupational turnover intentions, while those with an occupational focus (e.g., occupational satisfaction, salary satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation for choosing an occupation) would be more influential for occupational turnover intentions than for organizational turnover intentions.

## Wanting to Leave the Organization

### Leader Support

Employees consider their leaders as organizational representatives. According to social exchange theory, when leaders give their followers much support, the followers feel

indebted to the leaders and the organization, and thus are more likely to be engaged in tasks and committed to the organization (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). Leader support should be considered a work perception with an organizational focus rather than an occupational focus, and thus, we propose that it has a stronger relationship with organizational turnover intentions than with occupational turnover intentions.

### Colleague Support

Colleagues comprise the immediate context in which an employee works. Employees who are embedded in a social web at work develop a disinclination to leave (Lee, 2004). Similar to leader support, daily shared work experiences with colleagues do not generalize to the entire occupation. Researchers (Kerr & Slocum, 1987; Kopelman, Brief, & Guzzo, 1990) have argued that variation in employee retention across organizations is related to the organizational culture which is organization-specific and varies among companies in the same industry (Brightman & Sayeed, 1990; Chatman, 1991; Rentsch, 1990; Sheridan, 1992). Based on this reasoning, colleague support should be considered to have an organizational focus rather than an occupational focus, and thus, we propose that it would have a stronger relationship with organizational – rather than occupational – turnover intentions.

### Physical Resources for Work

Besides psychological and social support provided by leaders and peers as a form of job resources, organizations are also expected to provide the physical resources needed for an employee to perform work-related tasks (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007); indeed, it is almost taken for granted that organizations provide employees with adequate physical resources such as work materials (Mintzberg, 1979). In order to establish stable patterns of employee behavior, organizations should design the physical environment in order to coordinate and divide labor (Mintzberg, 1979). For most occupations, the levels of physical resources from the organization vary from one employer to another, which is particularly evident in this study.

Based on the above arguments, we propose the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* (a) Leader support (b) colleague support, and (c) physical resources for work are negatively associated with organizational turnover intentions.

*Hypothesis 2:* Organization-focused factors (i.e., leader support, colleague support, and physical resources for work) have a stronger relationship with organizational turnover intentions than with occupational turnover intentions.

## Wanting to Leave the Occupation

### Occupational Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been studied extensively as a predictor of turnover (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979). However, the majority of researchers have only studied overall job satisfaction (Chapman & Lowther, 1982; Ingersoll, 2001), leaving out consideration of one's satisfaction toward one's occupation (for an exception, see Ng & Feldman, 2007). In this study, occupational satisfaction was examined and proposed to be more closely related to an employee's occupational turnover intentions than to organizational turnover intentions.

### Salary Satisfaction

Whether salary satisfaction is an organization-specific or an occupation-wide factor depends on the dispersion of pay for the same type of job across different organizations and occupations. In this study, we expect salary satisfaction of teachers to have an occupational focus and thus be more closely related to an employee's occupational turnover intentions than to organizational turnover intentions.

### Intrinsic Occupational Choice Motivation

Intrinsic motivation involves engaging in work for its own sake because the work itself is interesting or satisfying (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Since whether work is interesting or satisfying is mainly determined by the occupation rather than the organization, it should be expected that employees' occupational turnover intentions should be better predicted by intrinsic occupational motivation than organizational turnover intentions.

Based on the above arguments, we propose the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 3:* (a) Occupational satisfaction, (b) salary satisfaction, and (c) intrinsic occupational choice motivation are negatively associated with occupational turnover intentions.

*Hypothesis 4:* Occupation-focused factors (i.e., occupational satisfaction, salary satisfaction, and intrinsic occupational choice motivation) have a stronger relationship with occupational turnover intentions than with organizational turnover intentions.

## Method

### Sample and Procedures

The data in this study were collected in rural areas of north-western China in 2007 as part of a large and publicly available dataset called the Gansu Survey of Children and

Families, a rigorous multilevel and longitudinal study of rural children's welfare (more information can be found at <http://china.pop.upenn.edu>). A total of 2,353 primary or junior secondary school teachers from 198 schools comprised the sample of this study, with 11.88 ( $SD = 10.97$ ) teachers per school on average. Among the 2,353 teachers, 60.4% were male, 83.1% were married, 24% had only finished their secondary education (with 76% had finished their tertiary-level education), 51.3% were from the same township, and 41.2% were teaching in primary schools versus secondary schools. The average age was 36.72 years. They had been teaching for 14.41 years and worked in the same school for 8.30 years on average. All surveys were administered in person by trained research assistants. All items were developed in Chinese by the research team based on past research, as well as careful piloting and discussion with local teachers and principals to ensure that the items were suitable for this setting.

## Measures

### Organizational and Occupational Turnover Intentions

Two items measuring turnover intentions were used in the study. They were "I want to move to a different school" (organizational turnover intentions) and "I want to change my occupation" (occupational turnover intentions). This method was similar to that used in previous research on turnover intentions (Krausz, Koslowsky, Shalom, & Elyakim, 1995). These two constructs were measured on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 2 = *not sure*, and 3 = *completely agree*).

### Leader Support

Four items measured leader support. They were "My principal has high expectations for me," "My principal respects me very much," "My principal offers me opportunities for self-development," and "My principal offers good suggestions on my teaching." This construct was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 3 = *not sure*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, and 5 = *completely agree*). Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ .

### Colleague Support

Four items measured colleague support. They were "I have a lot of opportunities to discuss teaching with my colleagues," "The activities organized by the teaching section/department are valuable," "I get along well with my colleagues in the school," and "The teachers in my school are highly motivated to work." This construct was measured on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 2 = *not sure*, and 3 = *completely agree*). Cronbach's  $\alpha = .63$ .

### Physical Resources for Work

Two items measured physical resources for work. They were "The school has adequate teaching materials and equipment" and "The school has adequate books and journals that I can refer to for preparation of my classes." This construct was measured on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 2 = *not sure*, and 3 = *completely agree*). Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ .

### Occupational Satisfaction

One item, "I am satisfied with my job as a teacher," measured occupational satisfaction on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 2 = *not sure*, and 3 = *completely agree*).

### Salary Satisfaction

One item, "I am satisfied with my salary," measured this construct on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 2 = *not sure*, and 3 = *completely agree*).

### Intrinsic Occupational Choice Motivation

Intrinsic occupational motivation was measured by three items: "I chose to be a teacher because I love being together with students," "I chose to be a teacher because I believe that education is very important for the development of the country," and "I chose to be a teacher because I had always wanted to be a teacher since I was little." These constructs were measured on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 2 = *not sure*, and 3 = *completely agree*). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .60.

### Control Variables

Teachers' age, sex (0 = male and 1 = female), education attainment level (0 = secondary level and 1 = tertiary level), marital status (0 = married, 1 = unmarried), tenure in the teaching profession and in the current school (in years), level of school taught (0 = primary and 1 = secondary), and whether they were working in their original hometowns (0 = no and 1 = yes) were controlled in the present study. We included these variables because, similar to teachers in other countries (Lachman & Diamant, 1987), younger, unmarried male teachers with greater human capital were found to be less satisfied with positions as teachers in rural China, while teachers who are more socially similar to the local community were found to be more satisfied (Sargent & Hannum, 2005). Moreover, it is also possible that, like younger teachers, the older teachers are also more likely to leave their jobs than middle-aged teachers. Older teachers may want to change positions or even professions because their accumulated expertise let them easier to get better-paid positions whether in or out of teacher occupation in cities. As a result, a nonlinear and parabolic relationship between age and turnover intentions could occur.

Thus, we also controlled the age groups to rule out the possible nonlinear effect of age on turnover intentions. Based on Caldwell et al.'s (2004) classification of age, we computed two dummy-coded age group variables: "age (1)," with participants younger than 25 coded as 1 and others as 0, and "age (2)," with participants older than 55 coded as 1 and others as 0.

## Measurement Issues

Although all scales measured in the current study were developed based on past research and had been tested in pilot studies, they had not been validated in previous research. To address this issue, we collected a small validation sample of 74 employees from a trading company in China. In the validation data, each self-developed scale was measured and paired with a well-developed scale measuring the same theoretical construct. Well-established scales include leader support (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990), colleague support (Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, & Pinneau, 1975), physical resources for work (Schneider, Parkington, & Buxton, 1980), occupational satisfaction (Greenhaus et al., 1990), salary satisfaction (Heneman & Schwab, 1985), intrinsic occupational motivation (Centers & Bugental, 1966), and occupational and organizational turnover intentions (Kelloway, Barling, & Shah, 1993). Among the 74 employees, 28 were female (37.8%), and 46 were male (62.2%). The average age was 26.12 years ( $SD = 4.11$ ), and 97.3% had a college degree or above. The average tenure of these employees was 38.64 months.

The validation test showed that Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of the criterion scales (i.e., well-developed scales) ranged from .90 to .99, indicating that all established measures had good internal consistency. Moreover, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of self-developed scales (used in the present study) in the validation data ranged from .84 to .97, which indicated very good reliability and provided supplemental evidence of reliability for these self-developed scales. Furthermore, every self-developed scale had a high correlation with the established measure – from .73 to .95 – indicating that these self-developed scales used in the current research have a good psychometric property.

## Analysis

Regarding the nested structure of the data (i.e., teachers nested within schools), physical resources for work was treated as a school-level variable and should be aggregated from individual ratings. Other study variables were all treated as individual-level variables. Thus, we calculated intra-class correlation coefficients (ICCs; Shrout & Fleiss,

1979) and  $rwg$  and  $rwg_{(j)}$  testing for within-team agreement (James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984) to make sure that physical resources for work has considerable between-group variance, and the other variables, on the contrary, have minimal between-group variance. To provide complete information on the justification for aggregation, ICCs and  $rwg/rwg_{(j)}$  were reported for all study variables. For organizational turnover intentions, ICC1 (i.e., amount of variance explained by group membership) = 0.167, ICC2 (i.e., reliability of group means) = 0.706, and  $rwg = 0.296$ ; for occupational turnover intentions, ICC1 = 0.112, ICC2 = 0.602, and  $rwg = 0.327$ ; for leader support, ICC1 = 0.132, ICC2 = 0.645, and  $rwg_{(j)} = 0.838$ ; for colleague support, ICC1 = 0.137, ICC2 = 0.655, and  $rwg_{(j)} = 0.765$ ; for physical resources for work, ICC1 = 0.186, ICC2 = 0.733, and  $rwg_{(j)} = 0.379$ ; for *occupational satisfaction*, ICC1 = 0.073, ICC2 = 0.486, and  $rwg = 0.556$ ; for *salary satisfaction*, ICC1 = 0.097, ICC2 = 0.565, and  $rwg = 0.200$ ; and for *intrinsic occupational choice motivation*, ICC1 = 0.120, ICC2 = 0.622, and  $rwg_{(j)} = 0.689$ . According to LeBreton and Senter (2008), although  $rwg_{(j)}$  of physical resources for work is relatively low and considered "weak agreement," it has an ICC2 greater than .70 and ICC1 greater than .15. Since physical resources for work was treated as a school-level variable aggregated from individual ratings, these levels of agreement are sufficient to justify aggregation. Moreover, both turnover intentions and all antecedents except physical resources for work were treated as individual-level variables in the subsequent analysis. For that all study variables have ICC1s from .07 to .19, showing "medium" effects of group membership; we then used multilevel modeling with Mplus 7 that allows us to test our research hypothesis at both individual level (Level-1) and group level (Level-2) of analysis while controlling for group-level variance of individual-level predictors (Bliese, 2000).

Four sets of analyses were performed using Mplus 7.2 (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2012). We first tested the impact of each predictor on respective types of turnover intentions by conducting separated regressions with one respective predictor and control variables included in each regression. Next, we put all predictors and control variables in two multilevel regression models. We provided the model formula for organizational turnover intentions as follows:

Level-1:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{OrTI}_{ij} = & \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}\text{LS}_{ij} + \beta_{2j}\text{CS}_{ij} + \beta_{3j}\text{Age}_{ij} + \beta_{4j}\text{Age1}_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{5j}\text{Age2}_{ij} + \beta_{6j}\text{Sex}_{ij} + \beta_{7j}\text{Mar}_{ij} + \beta_{8j}\text{Edu}_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{9j}\text{OrTen}_{ij} + \beta_{10j}\text{OcTen}_{ij} + \beta_{11j}\text{Town}_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{12j}\text{Grad}_{ij} + e_{ij} \end{aligned}$$

Level-2:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}PR_{0j} + u_{0j}$$

And the model formula for occupational turnover intentions is as follows:

Level-1:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{OcTI}_{ij} = & \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}\text{OS}_{ij} + \beta_{2j}\text{SS}_{ij} + \beta_{3j}\text{IM}_{ij} + \beta_{4j}\text{Age}_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{5j}\text{Age1}_{ij} + \beta_{6j}\text{Age2}_{ij} + \beta_{7j}\text{Sex}_{ij} + \beta_{8j}\text{Mar}_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{9j}\text{Edu}_{ij} + \beta_{10j}\text{OrTen}_{ij} + \beta_{11j}\text{OcTen}_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{12j}\text{Town}_{ij} + \beta_{13j}\text{Grad}_{ij} + e_{ij} \end{aligned}$$

where OrTI = organizational turnover intentions; LS = leader support; CS = colleague support; PR = physical resources for work; OS = occupational satisfaction; SS = salary satisfaction; IM = intrinsic *occupational choice motivation*; Age1 = dummy variable indicating younger than 25; Age2 = dummy variable indicating older than 55; Mar = marital status; Edu = educational level; OrTen = organizational tenure; OcTen = occupational tenure; Town = from the same town; Grad = teaching grade. Then, we used the net regression method (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003, p. 157 & p. 642) to calculate the difference between betas for different dependent variables to further support the focus-congruence hypotheses. Moreover, we used grand-mean centering for all of our analyses to facilitate the interpretation of the model results.

## Results

### Preliminary Analysis

To ensure the discriminant validity of the self-rated variables, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using Mplus 7.2 (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2012). The 6-factor model (i.e., all variables are independent of each other, except that two single-item turnover measures were merged as one factor and two single-item satisfaction measures were merged as another factor) provided a generally good fit to the data, with  $\chi^2(104) = 544.14$ ,  $p < .01$ , comparative fit index (CFI) = .95, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .94, and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .04. According to the chi-square difference tests, the 6-factor model fit the data significantly better than the one-factor model (i.e., combine all variables for active divergence),  $\chi^2(119) = 4,405.08$ ,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .52, TLI = .46, and RMSEA = .12. Thus, the discriminant validity of the study variables was supported.

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. The moderate correlation ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between organizational

turnover intentions and occupational turnover intentions demonstrates that they should be considered as separate – although related – constructs. Most control variables significantly correlated with the two dependent variables, except for marital status. All independent variables were significantly correlated with both dependent variables in the predicted directions.

### Hypotheses Test

Hypothesis 1 predicts that leader support, colleague support, and physical resources for work are negatively associated with organizational turnover intentions. Similarly, Hypothesis 3 predicts that occupational satisfaction, salary satisfaction, and intrinsic occupational choice motivation are negatively associated with occupational turnover intentions. We ran a series of analyses to test the above two hypotheses. First, we ran six regression models with each model including one of the two types of turnover intentions and one respective predictor (and controls) incorporated. The results revealed that, after controlling for sex, age (both linear and nonlinear), marital status, educational level, tenure in the teaching profession and in the current school, level of school taught, and whether teachers were working in their original hometowns, the association between organizational turnover intention and leader support ( $B = -0.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ), colleague support ( $B = -1.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and physical resources for work ( $B = -0.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was significant. Similarly, the relationship between occupational turnover intention and occupational satisfaction ( $B = -1.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ), salary satisfaction ( $B = -0.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and intrinsic occupational choice motivation ( $B = -1.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was also significant. Thus, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 3 were both supported.

Next, as shown in Table 2, we simultaneously put all predictors into the models predicting organizational turnover intentions and occupational turnover intentions. In general, occupational turnover intentions were negatively related to occupational satisfaction ( $B = -1.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ), salary satisfaction ( $B = -0.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and intrinsic occupational choice motivation ( $B = -1.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while organizational turnover intentions were negatively related to leader support ( $B = -0.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ), colleague support ( $B = -0.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and physical resources for work ( $B = -0.69$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This approach provided additional support of Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 3.

Furthermore, we tested whether organization-focused factors (i.e., leader support, colleague support, and physical resources for work) have a stronger relationship with organizational turnover intentions than with occupational turnover intentions (Hypothesis 2), and whether occupation-focused factors (i.e., occupational satisfaction,

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**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Sex	0.40	0.49	–																
2. Age	36.72	9.69	-.29**	–															
3. Age (1)	0.09	0.29	.19**	-.42**	–														
4. Age (2)	0.04	0.19	-.14**	.43**	-.06**	–													
5. Marital status	0.83	0.37	-.09**	.43**	-.52**	.06**	–												
6. Educational level	0.76	0.43	.07**	-.52**	.04	-.29**	-.11**	–											
7. Occupational tenure	14.41	10.15	-.26**	.95**	-.37**	.35**	.43**	-.52**	–										
8. Organizational tenure	8.30	7.71	-.11**	.59**	-.26**	.26**	.29**	-.30**	.60**	–									
9. Work in hometown	0.51	0.50	-.20**	.26**	-.08**	.13**	.11**	-.24**	.25**	.17**	–								
10. Teaching grade	0.59	0.49	-.12**	-.24**	-.05**	-.15**	-.03	.42**	-.27**	-.09**	-.16**	–							
11. Leader support	3.65	0.71	-.04*	-.07**	.07**	-.03	-.05*	.02	-.04*	-.05*	.04	-.02	(.78)	–					
12. Colleague support	2.62	0.42	.04*	.08**	.04	.04	-.02	-.12**	.08**	.03	.04*	-.13**	.32**	(.63)	–				
13. Physical resources	1.76	0.75	.08**	.06**	.01	.02	.01	-.09**	.09**	.10**	-.00	-.04	.18**	.34**	(.82)	–			
14. Occupational satisfaction	2.63	0.63	.04	.19**	-.05*	.09**	.08**	-.13**	.19**	.13**	.10**	-.12**	.08**	.28**	.16**	–			
15. Salary satisfaction	1.85	0.84	-.05*	.27**	-.04*	.15**	.08**	-.18**	.27**	.17**	.11**	-.13**	.09**	.21**	.20**	.22**	–		
16. Intrinsic motivation	2.51	0.49	.09**	.12**	.06**	.07**	-.01	-.20**	.12**	.09**	.11**	-.21**	.14**	.33**	.16**	.36**	.19**	(.60)	–
17. Occupational turnover intentions	1.73	0.78	-.04*	-.16**	-.01	-.12**	.02	.16**	-.15**	-.11**	-.09**	.17**	-.14**	-.28**	-.12**	-.49**	-.25**	-.40**	–
18. Organizational turnover intentions	1.86	0.80	-.04*	-.10**	.00	-.06**	-.01	.10**	-.11**	-.12**	-.08**	.06**	-.20**	-.28**	-.22**	-.17**	-.16**	-.17**	.35**

Note. *N* = 2,353. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) are reported along the diagonal in parentheses. Sex was coded as 0 = male and 1 = female; Age (1) = dummy variable indicating younger than 25; Age (2) = dummy variable indicating older than 55; educational level was coded as 0 = secondary level and 1 = tertiary level; marital status was coded as 0 = married and 1 = unmarried; teaching grade was coded as 0 = primary and 1 = secondary; work in hometown was coded as 0 = no and 1 = yes. \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01.

**Table 2.** Results of net regression analyses

Variables	Organizational turnover intentions	Occupational turnover intentions	Differences <sup>a</sup>
Age	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.03 <sup>†</sup> (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Age (1)	0.41* (0.27)	0.78*** (0.19)	-0.37 (0.34)
Age (2)	-0.02 (0.35)	0.13 (0.28)	-0.15 (0.45)
Sex	-0.11 (0.10)	-0.07 (0.10)	-0.04 (0.14)
Marital status	0.16 (0.13)	0.42** (0.13)	-0.26 (0.18)
Educational level	0.26 <sup>†</sup> (0.13)	0.02 (0.14)	0.24 (0.19)
Organizational tenure	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Occupational tenure	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)
Hometown working	-0.18 <sup>†</sup> (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)	-0.19 (0.14)
Teaching grade	-0.12 (0.12)	0.20 <sup>†</sup> (0.11)	-0.32 <sup>†</sup> (0.16)
IV: Organization-focused factors			
Leader support	-0.40*** (0.07)	-0.21** (0.07)	-0.19* (0.10)
Colleague support	-0.74*** (0.12)	-0.29* (0.12)	-0.45** (0.17)
Physical resources for work	-0.69*** (0.20)	-0.07 (0.15)	-0.62* (0.25)
IV: Occupation-focused factors			
Occupational satisfaction	-0.20** (0.07)	-1.31*** (0.08)	1.11*** (0.11)
Salary satisfaction	-0.20*** (0.06)	-0.30*** (0.06)	0.10 (0.08)
Intrinsic occupational choice motivation	-0.16 (0.10)	-1.07*** (0.11)	0.91*** (0.15)
Within-group $R^2$	0.133***	0.379***	
Between-group $R^2$	0.143 <sup>†</sup>	0.008	

Note.  $N = 2,353$ . Standard errors are reported in parentheses. <sup>a</sup>Reported difference between betas for different dependent variables from a single sample. <sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

salary satisfaction, and intrinsic occupational choice motivation) have a stronger relationship with occupational turnover intentions than with organizational turnover intentions (Hypothesis 4). In other words, we examined if the magnitude of the relationship between the antecedents and either type of turnover intentions was indeed significantly different. To do so, we used a test of the differences between betas for two dependent variables from a single sample (Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken, 2003, p. 157 & p. 642). The results showed that occupation-focused predictors have stronger relationships with occupational turnover intentions than organizational turnover intentions, for occupational satisfaction (difference = 1.11,  $p < .001$ ) and intrinsic occupational choice motivation ( $B = 0.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ), except for salary satisfaction ( $B = 0.10$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported in that two, but not all, of the occupation-focused predictors have a stronger association with occupational turnover intentions than with organizational turnover intentions. In contrast, three organization-focused predictors have stronger relationships with organizational turnover intentions than occupational turnover intentions, for leader support ( $B = -0.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ), colleague support ( $B = -0.45$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and physical resources for work ( $B = -0.62$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This provided full support for Hypothesis 4.

## Discussion

Drawing on social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent et al., 2002) and the focus-congruence approach (Jackofsky & Peters, 1983; Klein et al., 2012), and with a sample of 2,353 teachers in China, the current study firstly showed that three proposed organization-focused factors, namely leader support, colleague support, and physical resources for work, are negatively associated with organizational turnover intentions. Moreover, these three organization-focused factors have a stronger relationship with organizational turnover intentions than with occupational turnover intentions. Similarly, three proposed occupation-focused factors, namely occupational satisfaction, salary satisfaction, and intrinsic occupational choice motivation, are negatively associated with occupational turnover intentions. Furthermore, these three occupation-focused factors have a stronger relationship with occupational turnover intentions than with organizational turnover intentions.

## Theoretical Implications

The present research contributes to the literature on turnover in the following ways. First, the current study uncovers



how employees distinguish between intentions to leave their organizations and occupations, which supported the uniqueness of employees' intentions to change occupations as distinguished from leaving the organization. In line with earlier theorizing (e.g., Jackofsky, 1984; Jackofsky & Peters, 1983; Krausz et al., 1995; Wright & Bonett, 1992), these results suggest that organizational and occupational turnover intentions are constructs that were modestly correlated ( $r = .35$ ), sharing 13% of their variances.

Second, to address prior calls to assess organizational and occupational factors in turnover research (Woo & Maertz, 2012), we identified six individual and situational factors based on SCCT (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). Along with the focus-congruence approach (Klein et al., 2012), the findings show that associations were stronger when the foci of turnover intentions and potential antecedents match than when they did not (Jackofsky & Peters, 1983). While leader support, colleague support, and physical resources for work were negatively associated with organizational turnover intentions, more importantly, we identified occupational satisfaction, salary satisfaction, and intrinsic occupational choice motivation as predictors of occupational turnover intentions. Based on these findings, the present study sheds new light on the turnover research taking the perspective of switching occupations rather than changing organizations.

Third, while most previous research only focused on predicting organizational turnover intentions, this study is one of the few to simultaneously measure different dimensions of turnover intentions and test the quantity difference of those predictors' impact on them. Using net regression analyses, the present study revealed that occupation-focused predictors contributed more to the prediction of occupational turnover intentions than organization-focused predictors. In contrast, organization-focused predictors had stronger relationships with organizational turnover intentions than occupational turnover intentions. One unexpected result is that the negative relationships between salary satisfaction and two types of turnover intentions were both significantly negative, with no significant difference in the strength of relationships. This is perhaps because the salary level of schools in rural China is not only lower than that of other occupations but also lower than that of schools in urban areas; therefore, pay dissatisfaction triggers both types of turnover intentions.

Finally, this study contributes to the focus-congruence approach by generalizing it to a wider range of organizational phenomena. Because of varying beliefs about one's different roles and social identities (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel, 1972; Turner, 1982), an employee is able to form different attitudes toward organizational and occupational turnover. Similarly to turnover intentions, other important work attitudes

(e.g., commitment, identification, attachment, and trust) that are often treated as single-target constructs might also have more than one focus, reflect different constructs, and be related to different antecedents. For example, Zettler, Friedrich, and Hilbig (2011) divided career commitment into self-related work commitment and other-related work commitment and found a difference of predictivity of Machiavellianism on these two types of career commitment.

## Limitations and Future Directions

Due to the cross-sectional data and potential common method variance in this study, definitive conclusions about the differentiated models of turnover intentions require further work. Although it is worth noting that, as we employed multilevel modeling and some level-2 antecedents (e.g., physical resources for work) with different teachers' ratings aggregated at school level were included to predict individuals' turnover intentions, the concern over common method bias should be mitigated. In spite of this, the present study did not employ methods that would warrant causal inference, and "predictor" and "antecedent" were used in a general sense. To make better causal inferences, a longitudinal approach is needed in future research. Future researchers might also use objective data collected from other sources, such as supervisors, colleagues, or customers, to further reduce possible common method bias.

In addition, we used the comparison of beta coefficients from two regression models for two types of turnover intentions. The test of comparative effects may cause bias if the comparison is unfair (Cooper & Richardson, 1986). Unfair comparison occurs when the operationalization or measurement of the competing factors is not equally cared, or when the value of competing factors is not set at comparable levels along those factors' respective value distributions (Cooper & Richardson, 1986). Although we tried to operationalize and measure all predictors in an equivalent way, we acknowledge that possible unfair comparison may still exist and disturb the results. Future research could address this point and adopt alternative strategies that offer fairer comparisons between regression models. Besides, due to the limitation of the data, some constructs (e.g., dependent variables) in the current study were measured using single-item scales, which constrains the validity of the research findings. Future research could use well-developed scales instead to get more robust evidence of the relationship between two types of turnover and their antecedents.

Second, future research should use samples from various types of organizations and occupations to test turnover attitudes with different foci. In other types of organizations

(or bigger schools), the dynamics within work groups might have a significant impact on turnover intentions. Researchers who studied the importance of work-group identification relative to organizational identification found that the former was stronger than the latter, as well as more predictive of organizational attitudes and behavior such as job satisfaction, turnover intentions, job involvement, and job motivation (Van Knippenberg & Van Schie, 2000). In addition, some suggestions for management and human resources in other occupations may not apply to the education system but are useful for other organizations. For instance, Dalton and Todor (1993) suggested that changes in absenteeism and intra-organization transfer policies could reduce turnover. For many organizations, especially those that are large and decentralized, breaking down boundaries between workgroups or having more flexible schedules might boost retention.

Also, future studies could examine the mechanisms or boundary conditions of the relationship between organizational and occupational turnover intentions. Blau (1989) suggested that occupational turnover intentions may have incremental effects on turnover behavior beyond the effects of organizational turnover intentions. It also seems there might be a reciprocal relationship between organizational and occupational turnover intentions (Chang, Chi, & Miao, 2007). As Woo and Maertz (2012) reasoned, occupational turnover intentions may positively relate to organizational turnover intentions because changing occupations implies changing organizations when some employees do not have the opportunity to change occupations within a given organization. Occupational attachment might yet reduce turnover intentions under the condition that this particular occupation is compatible, supported, and given adequate status within the organization, and not readily available in other organizations (Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000). The opposite condition may translate into higher organizational turnover intentions for those who identify significantly with their occupation (Woo & Maertz, 2012).

Finally, although in the present study we treated organizational turnover intentions and occupational turnover intentions as two “parallel” choices that individuals have when considering career transition, we admitted that the actual behavior of organizational turnover and occupational turnover might be not so “parallel.” For that occupational turnover is much more difficult for individuals than organizational turnover and occurs much less often (Blau, 2007), the strength and mechanisms may be different for the links between the two types of turnover intentions and actual turnover behavior. Given the rare data on actual occupational turnover (Blau, 2007), this line of investigation is absent. Future research could address this issue and collect behavior data on the two types of turnover. In doing so, it will be possible to examine questions such as whether the

relationship between organizational turnover intentions and behavior is stronger than the relationship between occupational turnover intentions and behavior.

## Practical Implications

Differentiating between antecedents for organizational turnover intentions and occupational turnover intentions has practical implications for turnover interventions. For example, in the case of the intervention to curb teacher turnover in rural China, policymakers and education administrators should separate the issue of teacher shortage into two problems, namely teachers’ migration to more economically developed areas and teachers’ attrition from the occupation. At the country or regional level, policymakers should pay attention to both the school-specific factors and the occupation-wide factors that might contribute to teachers’ intentions to withdraw. Little is likely to be achieved, in terms of tackling the inequality of education quality between urban and rural areas, if policies focus only on occupation-wide factors, for example, selecting teachers that choose the occupation for intrinsic reasons. A teacher might have high levels of intrinsic motivation but still might leave a resource-constrained and low-performing school for a more desirable school.

On the other hand, by only focusing on interventions at the school level, such as the social exchange between principals and teachers, colleague support among teachers, or school physical resources, policymakers might still fail to retain teachers in the education system. In order to keep teachers both in their current schools and in the occupation, both school-specific and occupation-wide factors need to be addressed simultaneously. At the school level, administrators and teachers must be well informed to make the best use of school-specific resources, such as the social exchange between principals and teachers, colleague support among teachers, and physical resources for teachers to use. For example, although a school might not have the power to raise its teachers’ salaries, it can cultivate collaboration and cohesion among teachers and between teachers and the principal.

## Conclusion

In summary, this study provides evidence of the uniqueness of employees’ intentions to change occupations as distinguished from leaving the organization. Among factors that impacted these two types of withdrawal intentions, in general, associations were stronger when the foci of turnover intentions and potential antecedents matched than when they did not. For future research, the focus-congruence

approach offers a useful perspective for examining this phenomenon in organizations, so researchers and practitioners can arrive at a more nuanced understanding of both organizational and occupational commitment and withdrawal.

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