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WORK ENGAGEMENT AND TURNOVER INTENTIONS: DOES TASK ABSORPTION MODIFY CLASSICAL RELATIONSHIPS?

Anna PAWŁOWSKA

University of Warsaw Faculty of Management; annap@wz.uw.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-8534-3317

Purpose: The study aims to verify classical relationships between employee engagement and turnover intention. Prior research highlights the retention role of supervisor support and career satisfaction, alongside their negative association with job insecurity. Under transactional conditions, employees may demonstrate high absorption—defined as task-focused engagement—without organizational attachment, potentially increasing turnover intention, including mobility driven by higher remuneration. This study examines the structural relationships among these variables and absorption as a dimension of engagement.
Methodology: The study was funded by the IDUB program at the University of Warsaw. Data were collected in December 2022 using a CAWI survey on a random sample representative of the Polish population (N = 1,069). The analytical sample was limited to full-time employees (N = 545). Statistical analyses included multiple regression and path modeling.
Findings: Only the relationship between career satisfaction and absorption was statistically significant. This aligns with the logic of transactional employment conditions, where task performance serves as the primary source of engagement conceptualized as absorption. However, the overall path model did not achieve satisfactory fit indices. The findings challenge established assumptions regarding relationships between job insecurity, supervisor support, career satisfaction, turnover intention, and engagement.
Research limitations: The use of self-report measures introduces potential common method bias and limits validity, particularly as the study examines turnover intentions rather than actual behavior. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inference and dynamic analysis.
Practical implications: The results suggest that HRM systems should develop adaptive strategies addressing ongoing employee turnover as a structural feature of contemporary labor markets, rather than relying solely on engagement-focused interventions.
Social implications: Findings indicate adaptive employee responses to transactional work conditions, potentially reducing social and economic costs associated with ineffective managerial practices.
Originality: Absorption remains an underexplored dimension of engagement. The study contributes by presenting results that do not confirm dominant theoretical assumptions, supporting the value of publishing non-confirmatory findings (e.g., AsPredicted).
Keywords: absorption, engagement, career satisfaction, HR, turnover intention.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Contemporary labor market research indicates a shift toward a transactional psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995; Conway et al., 2011). Organizations and employees appear to operate within a transitional phase between established relational norms and increasingly dominant transactional rules, shaped, among other factors, by technological and demographic changes (Guest, 2004; Cappelli, 1999).

Relatively rarely do the dynamics of these transformations generate substantial methodological implications for research in the fields of human resource management (HRM) and organizational behavior. Empirical analyses continue to rely predominantly on classical theoretical frameworks and diagnostic instruments, whose adequacy in capturing emerging phenomena may be limited (Rynes et al., 2002). This may, in turn, hinder the identification of new trends and patterns of employee behavior.

Prior studies have demonstrated that organizational engagement reduces turnover intention (Saks, 2006). However, persistently high levels of employee mobility suggest the presence of additional moderators of this relationship, while available evidence remains inconsistent. For instance, the Monster report (2024) indicates that 93% of respondents planned to change jobs in 2025. In contrast, data from CBOS show that 9.9% of adult Poles intend to change jobs in 2026, with 35% citing professional development as the primary reason.

The determinants of engagement identified in previous research largely remain within the sphere of organizational influence (Hom et al., 2017). Research models frequently assume a relational foundation of the employee–organization bond. This assumption, however, may weaken with the growing prevalence of the transactional psychological contract, in which exchange processes are primarily task- and reward-oriented (Rousseau, 1995; Guest, 2004). Within this framework, the degree of cognitive task absorption gains relevance (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Consequently, the question arises regarding the role of engaging work tasks relative to classical retention predictors, such as supervisor support, career satisfaction, and perceived job insecurity (Saks, 2006; Ng et al., 2010). Of particular importance is whether task absorption may mediate the relationships between these variables and turnover intention (Twenge et al., 2010).

This issue may be especially salient for individuals characterized by high absorption rooted in professional rather than organizational loyalty (Świątek-Barylska, 2013; Lipka et al., 2012), who may demonstrate a propensity to leave irrespective of organizational factors traditionally associated with retention.

Accordingly, within the present approach, engagement was operationalized using the absorption dimension of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli et al., 2006), with the objective of simultaneously examining whether the relationships identified in prior

research would be replicated. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the stability of predictive relationships and to evaluate the relative contribution of the independent variables. Subsequently, the study examined the effects of integrating variables traditionally associated with turnover intention within a single path model.

A path model incorporating job insecurity, supervisor support, and career satisfaction in relation to turnover intention was therefore tested, assuming mediation by absorption/engagement (Saks, 2006; Ng, Feldman, 2010). A distinction was made between general turnover propensity and transactional turnover propensity driven by higher remuneration. This analytical framework more accurately reflects employees' real-world organizational contexts, in which these factors co-occur.

The combination of these two analytical strategies enhances the interpretative validity of the findings and strengthens the robustness of inferences regarding the underlying mechanisms (Hom et al., 2017). Regression analysis enables the evaluation of the relative contribution of predictors to the observed effect, whereas path modeling facilitates the identification of structural interdependencies among variables.

The empirical contribution of the study stems from the relatively rare practice of examining turnover propensity simultaneously in its general and remuneration-driven forms, particularly in relation to task absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The theoretical implications relate to the possibility that engagement, under conditions characterized by the predominance of a transactional psychological contract, may assume a distinct structural configuration. This perspective suggests the potential need for refinement of theoretical models and diagnostic instruments within organizational behavior and human resource management research (Rynes et al., 2002).

2. Job insecurity, supervisor support, and career satisfaction as determinants of employee turnover

In pursuit of the stated research objective, the study draws upon the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model, which posits that employee functioning is determined by the balance between job demands and available resources (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2017). Consistent with this framework, job insecurity was conceptualized as a job demand, supervisor support as an organizational resource, and career satisfaction as a personal resource.

Job insecurity was operationalized as a unidimensional construct reflecting the subjective perception of a threat of job loss. The traditional distinction between quantitative and qualitative job insecurity (Greenhalgh, Rosenblatt, 1984) was deliberately not adopted, as such differentiation is more strongly tied to specific employment contexts (Hellgren et al., 2002).

Instead, the analysis focused on the affective component of general concerns regarding job continuity (Jiang, Lavaysse, 2018).

Supervisor support was operationalized in line with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) framework, defining it as the perceived availability of instrumental and emotional assistance in performing work-related tasks (HSE, 2007). Within the JD–R perspective, supervisor support constitutes a relational resource that mitigates the adverse effects of job demands and facilitates employee retention (Bakker et al., 2017). Prior studies have consistently demonstrated negative associations between supervisor support and turnover intention (Akgunduz et al., 2018; Jung et al., 2023).

Career satisfaction is defined as a cognitive and subjective evaluation of one's career trajectory, goal attainment, and alignment with individual standards of success (Hofmans et al., 2008). Unlike job satisfaction, career satisfaction reflects a more longitudinal and dynamic perspective (Ng et al., 2014). Empirical evidence indicates that career satisfaction is negatively related to turnover intention (Ng et al., 2014).

Turnover propensity was examined from two complementary perspectives: a transactional orientation, referring to the willingness to change employers in response to higher remuneration, and a general intention to leave. This distinction follows from the assumptions of the transactional psychological contract, within which mobility decisions may be governed by distinct regulatory mechanisms (Rousseau, 1995; Guest, 2004). Supporting this rationale, recent labor market reports indicate that remuneration remains a dominant factor in job change decisions, with 81% of employees identifying salary as the primary driver (Randstad, as cited in PARP, 2026).

Within the proposed research framework, the study examines whether classical relationships between these determinants and turnover intention remain stable when analyzed simultaneously and when accounting for the mediating role of absorption/engagement.

3. The mediating role of absorption in turnover intention

The variables outlined above have been extensively linked to work engagement, whose relevance for turnover intention is well established (Hom et al., 2017). According to the JD–R model, engagement is enhanced by job resources and diminished under conditions of elevated demands and stressors, including job insecurity (Bakker et al., 2017).

However, prior conclusions regarding the retention-related function of engagement have largely relied on conceptualizations emphasizing the employee–organization relationship. Within this tradition, engagement has been defined either as a multidimensional state encompassing cognitive, emotional, and physical involvement in work roles (Kahn, 1990) or as a construct conceptually opposed to burnout (Maslach et al., 1997).

In the context of evolving labor market conditions, increasing attention has been devoted to distinguishing between organizational engagement and work engagement (Saks, 2006). This distinction aligns with contemporary trends such as boundaryless careers, workpreneurship, and market-oriented employment attitudes, which increasingly redefine the nature of employee–organization relationships (Rifkin, 2023). Empirical reports further suggest that a substantial proportion of employees prefer flexible, portfolio-based career paths over traditional linear advancement models (Randstad, as cited in PARP, 2026).

Accordingly, the present study operationalizes engagement using the absorption dimension of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which captures a task-focused, motivational–cognitive form of engagement rather than an organization-centered orientation (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Absorption refers to a state of deep concentration and immersion in work tasks, often accompanied by a diminished awareness of time and surroundings. The decision to focus exclusively on this dimension was guided by its conceptual alignment with transactional work orientations, wherein task execution assumes central importance. Such an approach enables a more precise examination of retention mechanisms under conditions characterized by weakened relational bonds with the organization.

Despite its theoretical relevance, absorption remains relatively underexplored as a mediating construct in turnover research. Consequently, the study seeks to determine whether absorption differentiates the mechanisms underlying transactional turnover propensity (e.g., remuneration-driven mobility) and general turnover intention.

Moreover, prior research has rarely addressed whether engagement serves exclusively as a retention factor or whether it may also heighten employees' sensitivity to perceived pay inequities (Singh, Loncar, 2010). This issue becomes increasingly salient considering growing transparency in compensation systems.

4. Hypotheses and the theoretical path model

Interpreting the preceding considerations through the lens of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, employees are assumed to strive to protect and accumulate valued resources. Consequently, when individuals experience job insecurity, even highly absorbed or engaged employees may actively seek more favorable employment conditions. On this basis, a theoretical path model was developed (Figure 1). The research hypotheses, however, were formulated with reference to specific structural paths within the model.

H1. There is a relationship between job insecurity and absorption.

H2. There is a relationship between career satisfaction and absorption.

H3. There is a relationship between supervisor support and absorption.

H4. There is a relationship between absorption and general turnover propensity.

H5. There is a relationship between absorption and transactional turnover propensity, defined as the willingness to change employers in response to higher remuneration.

The hypotheses outlined above constitute the foundation of the theoretical model, which was empirically tested within the population of employees holding full-time employment contracts.

It is also noteworthy that, according to recent reports, only 22% of respondents do not intend to change jobs, including 42% of individuals aged over 55, compared with merely 8% among respondents aged 18-24 (Infor, 2026).

These observations provide grounds for anticipating that the mechanisms underlying the relationships among the analyzed variables may differ across age groups. Accordingly, Hypothesis 6 was formulated:

H6. There is a relationship between absorption and age.

The theoretical path model examined in this study assumes that there is a relationship between job insecurity, supervisor support, career satisfaction and turnover intention, conceptualized both as general and transactional turnover propensity, with absorption/ engagement specified as a mediating construct.

5. Research scheme

The study was funded by a microgrant awarded in 2022 under the Excellence Initiative – Research University (IDUB) program at the University of Warsaw. The project was carried out in substantive and methodological collaboration with P. Wójcik, PhD.

The dataset was derived from a survey study conducted by the external research agency ARIADNA using the CAWI method in December 2022. The initial random sample comprised N = 1,069 respondents and was representative of the Polish population aged 18-75 years with respect to age, gender, and place of residence. For analytical purposes, the sample was restricted to employees holding full-time employment contracts (N = 545).

The research instrument comprised three diagnostic scales demonstrating acceptable levels of internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Responses were recorded using five-point Likert scales, except for the absorption/engagement measure, which employed a seven-point frequency scale ranging from 1 ("never") to 7 ("always/daily").

Absorption/engagement was assessed using six items derived from the absorption dimension of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli et al., 2006), yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85.

Career satisfaction was measured using a three-item scale (e.g., "I am satisfied with the extent to which I have achieved my career goals") (Hofmans et al., 2008), with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80.

Supervisor support was measured using five items from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards Indicator Tool (HSE, 2007), including items such as "I receive support when performing emotionally demanding work", yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85.

All scales exceeded the recommended reliability threshold of 0.70, supporting their suitability for path analysis (Konarski, 2009).

Job insecurity was measured using a single-item indicator, consistent with approaches focusing on the perceived global sense of insecurity rather than its multidimensional structure (De Witte, 2005; Sverke et al., 2002).

Turnover propensity was assessed using two single-item measures analyzed separately:

- General turnover propensity: "Do you intend to change your job/business activity within the next year?"
- Transactional turnover propensity: "If I received a job offer with higher remuneration, I would change my employer".

Descriptive statistics for all study variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics for the scales and items used in the study

Variable	Descriptive Statistics		
	N	Mean	SD
Absorption/Engagement	545	4,43	1,15
Job Insecurity	545	2,76	1,03
Career Satisfaction	545	3,24	0,76
Supervisor Support	545	3,21	0,89
General Turnover Propensity	545	2,30	1,12
Transactional Turnover Propensity (Higher Remuneration)	545	3,69	0,95

Note: N = sample size; SD = standard deviation.

Source: Author's elaboration based on own data analyses.

6. Results

The formulated research hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis and path modeling implemented in Statistica (version 14). Table 2 presents the estimates of the multiple regression coefficients corresponding to Hypotheses 1-6.

Table 2.
Regression coefficients for the dependent variable: absorption/engagement

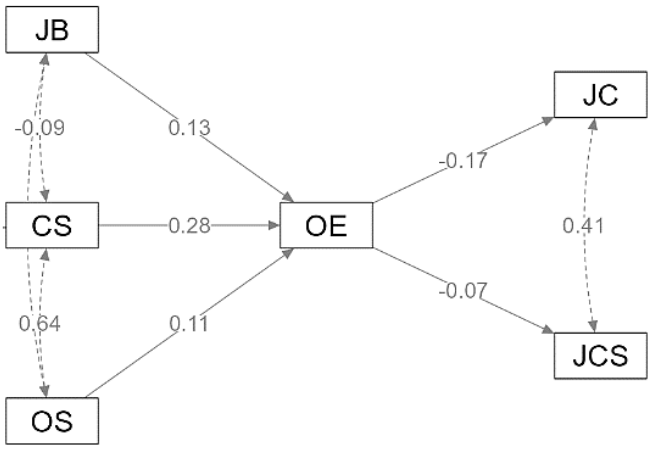
	Regression Analysis (Dependent Variable: Absorption) R = ,39; R2 = ,15; Adjusted R2 = ,14; F(6,538) = 16,36; p < 0,01						
	β	**Standard Error β**	**b**	**Standard Error b**	**T**	**p-value**	**N**
Constant			2,12	0,38	5,46	0,01	
OS	**0,11**	0,05	0,14	0,06	2,17	0,03	545
CS	**0,26**	0,05	0,39	0,07	4,99	0,01	545
JB	**0,14**	0,04	0,16	0,04	3,62	0,06	545
JCS	**0,02**	0,04	0,02	0,05	0,53	0,59	545
JC	**-0,10**	0,04	-0,10	0,04	-2,30	0,07	545
age	**0,065**	0,04	0,01	0,00	1,56	0,11	545

Note: β = standardized regression coefficient; b = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; T = t-statistic; p = significance level, N = sample size; OE – absorption/engagement; OS – supervisor support; CS – career satisfaction; JB – job insecurity; JCS – transactional turnover propensity (higher remuneration); JC – general turnover propensity; age – respondents' age in years.

Source: Author's elaboration based on own data analyses.

The interpretation of the multiple regression results indicates that the majority of the coefficients are statistically non-significant. Statistically significant relationships were observed only for the associations between supervisor support (OS), career satisfaction (CS), and absorption/engagement (OE). Although the relationship between supervisor support (OS) and absorption (OE) reached statistical significance (Hypothesis 3), the regression coefficient was relatively small (0.11). Consequently, only Hypothesis 2 can be considered convincingly supported, whereas Hypotheses 1, 4, 5, and 6 were not confirmed.

In addition, a path model was tested to examine the relationships postulated in the literature among job insecurity, supervisor support, career satisfaction, turnover intention, and absorption/engagement as a mediating construct. Path analysis enables the assessment of structural interdependencies that may be difficult to capture using multiple regression techniques. Figure presents the path model, whose structure reflects the theoretically hypothesized relationships.



Note: OE – absorption/engagement; OS – supervisor support; CS – career satisfaction; JB – job insecurity; JCS – transactional turnover propensity (higher remuneration); JC – general turnover propensity.

Figure 1. Path model for the general analytical sample.

Source: Author's elaboration based on own data analyses.

The path model parameters were estimated using the maximum likelihood method. Table 3 reports selected model fit indices, specifically those considered less sensitive to large sample sizes. The reported values indicate that the tested path model demonstrates a low level of fit to the empirical data (Sagan, 2018).

Table 3.
Model fit indices

	Indices
	Value
Joreskog GFI	0,81
Joreskog AGFI	0,71
Bentler-Bonett Normed Fit Index	0,72
Bentler Comparative Fit Index	0,72
James-Mulaik-Brett Parsimonious Fit Index	0,33
Bollen's Delta	0,73

Source: Author's elaboration based on own data analyses.

The results presented in Table 3 indicate that the tested path model, incorporating all variables within a single analytical framework and capturing structural relationships beyond those examined through multiple regression analysis, did not demonstrate satisfactory fit indices (Sagan, 2018).

7. Conclusion

The regression analysis provided convincing support for only Hypothesis 2, confirming the association between career satisfaction and absorption. This finding is consistent with the logic of employee functioning under transactional norms, wherein task performance constitutes a primary source of engagement conceptualized as absorption, while such engagement does not necessarily exhibit retention-related effects.

However, the path model incorporating all variables within a single analytical framework, thereby more closely reflecting organizational realities, did not demonstrate satisfactory fit indices. These results provide grounds for questioning the classical relationships among job insecurity, supervisor support, career satisfaction, turnover intention, and engagement operationalized as absorption. The findings thus offer a point of departure for further refinement of structural models and research approaches. Notably, the observed pattern appears more consistent with challenges reported by HRM practitioners, who frequently contend with low engagement and high employee turnover (PARP, 2026).

The presentation of these findings also aligns with the methodological postulate emphasizing the scientific value of reporting results that do not confirm hypotheses derived from prior research, which increasingly constitutes a meaningful research contribution, as reflected in expectations regarding study preregistration (e.g., AsPredicted). In the present

case, these results are particularly relevant, as they extend prior research on employee–employer relationships within evolving labor market conditions.

Nevertheless, the reliance on self-report measures introduces limitations characteristic of this methodological approach (risk of common method bias), including potential biases associated with social desirability and reduced reliability of the findings (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Spector, 2006). Furthermore, analyses based on turnover intentions rather than actual mobility behavior may restrict predictive validity (Hom et al., 2017). This research design limits the ability to examine the dynamics of the process and draw conclusions about the direction of causality.

Future research should therefore prioritize qualitative and longitudinal designs capable of capturing trajectories of engagement, resource perceptions, and actual turnover behavior. Expanding the operationalization of engagement to include additional UWES dimensions (vigor and dedication) may provide a more comprehensive understanding of retention mechanisms. Moreover, incorporating contextual variables, such as pay transparency, perceived organizational justice, and the availability of alternative employment opportunities, may substantially enhance explanatory power (Singh, Loncar, 2010).

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest the importance of designing work environments that foster cognitive concentration, task autonomy, and perceived meaningfulness of work, particularly in relation to career satisfaction (Bakker et al., 2017). At the same time, the results indicate that increased task-focused engagement does not necessarily attenuate transactional mobility, especially under conditions characterized by strong economic incentives and growing pay transparency.

Strategically, these findings underscore the necessity of developing adaptive managerial practices that recognize high employee turnover as a structural characteristic of contemporary labor markets.

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