1-1-2022

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Seong Eun Kim
University at Albany, State University of New York, ksarahsarah84@gmail.com

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Why Do Employees Churn? Career and Organizational Commitment as Mediators of the relation between Regulatory Foci and Turnover Intentions

by

Seong Eun Kim

A Thesis
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

College of Arts and Sciences
Department of Psychology
2022
Abstract

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic situation that causes restructure or downsize of organizations, the annual turnover rate is increasing. Why do employees churn? This study integrates regulatory foci (i.e., promotion and prevention focus) theory with theories of work commitment (i.e., organizational and career commitment) and turnover intentions to propose that individual differences in regulator focus differentially relate to organization and career commitment, particularly highlighting career commitment, and that these work commitment variables differentially relate to turnover intentions. To test these propositions, I used a three-wave observational design with a two-week separation targeting high-tech professionals working in the United States. Based on a two-step structural equation modeling analysis, I found support for the relations between prevention focus and organizational commitment and partial support for the relation between promotion focus and career commitment. Likewise, I found partial support for the relation between career commitment and turnover intentions. The proposed indirect effects, however, were not supported. This study provided an explication for how each regulatory focus can be related to organizational and career commitment and how career planning in career commitment can be related to turnover intentions. Following the results, theoretical implications as well as limitations and future direction of this study were discussed.

Keywords: turnover, turnover intention, regulatory foci, promotion focus, prevention focus, work commitment, organizational commitment, career commitment, affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment, career planning
Why Do Employees Churn? Career and Organizational Commitment as Mediators of the relation between Regulatory Foci and Turnover Intentions

According to a 2021 Bureau of Labor Statistics report, the annual turnover rate in 2020 was 57.3%, which is almost twice as high as 1999. Despite the current pandemic that prompted many organizations to restructure and downsize (The Foundation for Government Accountability [FGA], 2020), the turnover rate remains remarkably high—25% when considering only voluntary turnover, and 3% when looking at only high performers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Overall, the turnover rate is 9% higher than the average annual turnover rate in the United States (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2016).

These turnover rates beg the question: Why do employees leave their organizations (i.e., churn)? Here, I propose that individual differences in regulatory focus and work commitment can explain why employees churn. According to regulatory focus theory (RFT; Higgins, 1997), individuals are driven to either approach pleasure or avoid pain, and this depends on their innate tendencies—either a promotion focus or a prevention focus. Individuals with a promotion focus represent goals as hopes and aspirations, whereas individuals with a prevention focus represent their goals as duties and obligations. Therefore, these individuals take different behavioral strategies to achieve their goals—either eagerness means or vigilance means. By using eagerness means, people ensure gains, whereas by using vigilance means, people ensure avoiding losses (Higgins et al., 2001). As is discussed in more detail later, I propose that these differences in goal pursuit influence employee’s work commitment differently, which, in turn, drives churn intentions.
Work commitment comprises both career commitment and organizational commitment (Zhu et al., 2021). Whereas the former relates to one’s vocation as envisioned/internalized by an individual, the latter relates to loyalty or emotional attachment to the current employing organization (Zhu et al., 2021). Due to the changing nature of work and how career advancements occur (Direnzo & Greenhaus, 2011; Noordin et al., 2002; Shah, 2011), employees are more likely to be committed to their careers rather than to their specific organizations. In pursuit of career opportunities, then, career commitment is likely to drive individuals to leave their jobs (Zhu et al., 2021). Namely, employees who realize that their tenure in organizations can no longer guarantee desired career advancements, and/or those who want to be align their career goals with their work environment (Goulet & Singh, 2002), are more likely to leave their jobs to take major responsibility for their career development (Fu, 2011). As such, I propose that career commitment is positively related to turnover intentions, and may explain the increasing churn among employees.

This study makes several important contributions to why individual employees churn (i.e., leave), drawing on mechanisms from regulatory foci and work commitment. First, the study investigates how individual differences in regulatory focus (i.e., promotion and prevention focus) relate to work commitment (career commitment and organizational commitment), including a specific focus on career commitment. Although there has been research on the regulatory foci and organizational commitment (Goulet & Singh, 2002), the research on regulatory foci and career commitment is limited. Second, this study investigates the joint effects of regulatory foci and work commitment on turnover intention, proposing that work commitment is a mediator of
the relation between regulatory foci and turnover intention, contributing a novel perspective on turnover intentions. Whereas a number of studies have investigated organizational commitment as an antecedent of turnover (Blau & Boal, 1989, Meyer & Allen, 1991; O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Taylor et al., 1996) and career commitment as a moderator of this relation (Chang, 1999; Koslowsky et al., 2012), relatively little research has investigated the effects of both types of commitment as simultaneous mediators of turnover intentions. Importantly, the aforementioned moderator effects suggest the presence of a mediator to be tested at a more advanced stage of research (Baron & Kenny, 1986). As such, the previous research of the moderating effects of work commitment can be extended to examine the mediating effects as well. In short, although there seems to be growing interests in the research on regulatory foci and turnover intentions, theoretical and empirical research that support the fully mediated effect is still underdeveloped.

**Regulatory Foci**

According to Higgins (1998), people have two distinct self-regulatory foci: promotion focus and prevention focus. Those who are motivated by growth and development needs, in which they attempt to align their actual selves (who they are) with their ideal selves (who they want to be), are said to have a promotion focus, whereas those who are responsive to security needs, in which they try to match their actual selves with their ought selves (who other people think they should be), have a prevention focus (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). Lanaj et al. (2012) specified that promotion focus caters to nurturance needs and ideal goals such as hopes, wishes, and aspirations that orient people toward advancement, growth, and accomplishment, and it sensitizes people to experiencing emotions that range from cheerfulness to dejection. Thus,
promotion-focused individuals are more likely to self-regulate through approaches that match their desired end states, causing them to adopt an eagerness strategy centered on achieving their goals.

Prevention focus, in contrast, caters to “ought” goals such as duties, obligations, and responsibilities. That is, prevention-focused individuals concentrate more on protection and safety, and it sensitizes people to experiencing emotions that range from quiescence to agitation. Thus, prevention-focused individuals are motivated to avoid mismatches/risks to their desired end states, causing them to adopt a vigilance strategy centered on achieving accuracy and meeting minimal standards of performance (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Förster et al., 2004; Lanaj et al., 2012). In summary, people with both foci pursue goals, but they use different strategic means to achieve the goals with promotion-focused individuals seeking pleasure and prevention-focused individuals avoiding pain (Lanaj et al., 2012).

**Work Commitment**

**Career Commitment**

Here, I argue that career commitment (CC) can also help explain why employees churn (Hall, 1971). Whereas organizational commitment is viewed as an individual’s loyalty or attachment specifically to their current organization (e.g., Google; Koslowsky et al., 2012; Zhu et al., 2021), CC is defined as an individual’s attitude toward their vocation or profession more generally (e.g., software engineer; Blau, 1985; Cai et al., 2018). In short, CC is the extent to which an individual identifies with, values, and has a positive evaluation of their profession as a whole, which influences the amount of time and effort they spend acquiring vocation-relevant
knowledge. CC also influences setting personal career goals (e.g., advancing to a position of lead software designer; Collarelli & Bishop, 1990).

Based on London’s (1983) career motivation theory, Carson and Bedeian (1994) proposed three components to CC: (1) career planning (one’s drive to advance in their career and set career-related goals); (2) career resilience (persistence in career goal pursuit, especially when facing discouraging circumstances); (3) and career identity (the extent to which persons define themselves by their work). In summary, individuals who are willing to exert energy and be persistent in pursuing personal career goals are considered committed to their careers (Goulet & Singh, 2002).

The relation between CC and turnover intention, however, is not clear. Whereas some studies show a negative relation between CC and job withdrawal intentions and turnover (Aryee & Tan, 1992; Bedeian et al., 1991; Blau, 1985, 1989; Lakhani & Gade, 1992; McGinnis & Morrow, 1990), others (e.g., Koslowsky et al., 2012) demonstrated that CC and turnover intentions are positively correlated in some sectors (e.g., technology), but negatively correlated in others. As such, the relation between CC and turnover intentions is unclear.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment (OC) characterizes an individual employee’s bond with their place of employment (Battistelli et al., 2006; Raza & Nawaz, 2011), and is a central explanation for why people stay at their jobs (Lee et al., 2017). Meyer and Allen (1991) conceptualized a three-component model of OC: affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Affective commitment relates to the emotions that employees attach to organizations. This positive
emotional attachment prevents them from seeing their organizations’ drawbacks and moving forward despite undesirable situations (Lanaj et al., 2012). Because of this emotional attachment to the employing organization, then, highly affectively committed individuals are likely to want to remain with their organizations (Mercurio, 2015).

Continuance commitment refers to employees’ attachment to an employing organization derived from a fear of losing the rewards associated with having a job if the employee turned over (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Yousef, 2021)—an aspect of job (in)security (Öztürk et al., 2017). An employee’s decisions to stay or leave an organization, therefore, is driven by the exchange relationships with their organizations (Huselid & Day, 1991; Singh & Gupta, 2015), such that employees will remain with an organization if they think they are going to lose more than they would gain from leaving their organizations.

Normative commitment refers to employees’ attachment to an employing organization stemming from a felt obligation in the exchange relations between the organization and the employees (Meyer et al., 2004). Thus, employees stay with an organization to the extent that they believe they owe a debt to the organization (Yousef, 2021). In sum, although OC is negatively related to turnover intention (Chang, 1999; Loi et al., 2006) and actual turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000), the underlying motivation for remaining with the organization differs based on the component of commitment.

**Turnover Intention and Turnover**

Turnover intentions are cognitions about wanting to leave one’s job, whereas turnover is actually leaving (AK, 2018). According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991),
behavioral intentions are the most proximal predictor of actual behavior (Allen et al., 2005). As such, studying factors that influence intentions focuses on factors that are related to behavior, even though the actual behavior may not occur due to factors outside the control of the actor. Importantly, results of five meta-analyses (i.e., Carsten & Spector, 1987; Dalton et al., 1999; Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Steel & Ovalle, 1984; Tett & Meyer, 1993), show strong relations between turnover intentions and actual turnover, ranging from .31 to .52, accounting for between 9% to 25% of the variance in turnover (Cho & Lewis, 2012). In short, turnover intentions are a reliable predictor of actual turnover (Hom et al., 2017; Mobley, 1977), suggesting it is important to understand the antecedents of turnover intentions.

**Theory and Hypotheses**

Here, I propose that regulatory foci cause turnover intention through work commitment (Figure 1). In the following section, I discuss the effects of regulatory foci on work commitment, and then work commitment as a mediator on employee turnover intention.
Figure 1. Proposed hypotheses linking regulatory foci and turnover intentions
Effects of Regulatory Foci on Work Commitment

There are strong theoretical explanations for why regulatory foci cause work commitment (Meyer et al., 2004). First, I propose that a promotion-focused regulatory focus will result in increased career commitment. According to RFT, promotion-focused individuals are motivated to accomplish their ideal goals attempting to align their actual selves with their ideal selves. Promotion-focused individuals are also more interested in their autonomous growth and self-development. As such, I posit that they are more likely to commit to their career paths to fulfill these goals to meet their ideal selves. For example, promotion-focused software engineers will learn new knowledge areas and skills to continue to develop within their profession of software engineer. The actions this software engineer takes, therefore, is in pursuit of satisfying career, not organizational, goals. If the employing organization does not provide its software engineer with opportunities to grow their career within their organization, they may look for new organizations in which to grow (i.e., advance to lead software engineer). In short, because promotion-focused individuals seek to develop themselves in pursuit of their ideal selves, they are likely to take actions that promote a commitment to a career path. As such, individuals high in promotion-focused drives will show greater career commitment. Therefore, I hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1-a: Promotion focus will be positively associated with CC.

In contrast, prevention-focused individuals are motivated to satisfy their security needs and attain their ought goals that serve duties, obligations, and responsibilities with the attempt to align their actual selves with their ought selves (who other people think they should be). (Meyer et al., 2004) Because they are more concerned with avoiding threats to their jobs and protecting current
resources, I posit that prevention-focused individuals will focus on maximizing their current employment situations therein engendering loyalty/attachment to their employing organizations in hopes of not losing what they currently have (i.e., current employment). For example, a prevention-focused software engineer, being less focused on advancing themselves to their ideal self, will act to meet the standards of their ought-self. As such, the prevention-focused software engineer will focus on actions to engender a positive reaction from their employing organization. This software engineer, then, will commit to their employing organization and be less willing to churn. In essence, because prevention-focused individuals are averse to lost resources (Higgins, 1997) in pursuit of their ought selves, they are less likely to risk the uncertainty of new organizations. Instead, they are likely to be more committed to their organizations. Therefore, I hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1-b: Prevention focus will be positively associated with OC.

Effects of Work Commitment on Turnover Intention

As mentioned previously, CC refers to an attitude toward one’s vocation (Blau, 1985), pertaining to an individual’s capacity to build career goals and to be involved in a series of work-related activities essential for career progression within a specific field of work (Cai et al., 2018). As such, CC is driven more by individuals’ intrinsic desires, and somewhat independent of one’s current work environment (e.g., the employing organization). Prior research has shown that CC, as part of London’s (1983) career resilience and career identity components, is negatively related to career withdrawal intentions such as thoughts of changing careers, intentions to turnover, intentions to search (Blau, 1989; Cohen, 2000). However, the career planning component of CC
(i.e., one’s drive to advance in their career and set career-related goals) may show a different relation to turnover intentions. That is, because planning requires self-motivation, the individual engaged in career planning would set goals and try to attain these goals (Carson & Carson, 1998). Furthermore, the changing nature of work has seen a shift from employees spending their entire careers with a single organization, working their way up the career ladder (Direnzo & Greenhaus, 2011; Noordin et al., 2002; Shah, 2011). Instead, the pursuit of career goals now necessitates changing organizations (Bedeian et al., 1991), therein suggesting those committed to their career are likely to be willing to churn to satisfy career goals. Thus, it can be posited that promotion-focused individuals have a stronger tendency to be committed to their career insofar as they take promotion-focused opportunities such as learning new thing and setting challenging goals. As such, the high CC individual will show a stronger intention to leave their organizations in the pursuit of opportunities to satisfy their CC-based goals. Therefore, I hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 2-a:** CC will be positively associated with turnover intentions.

OC, however, is a psychological state reflecting employees’ attachment to their specific employing organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Johnson et al., 2010). Considerable research based on the three-component model has consistently revealed that all three components tend to bind employees to the organizations, and therefore relate negatively to turnover (Meyer et al., 2002). However, each component of commitment is not equally strongly related to turnover intentions, with affective commitment showing the strongest relation, following by normative commitment, and finally continuance commitment (Chang, 1999; Meyer et al., 2002; 2012a).
More specifically, affective commitment allows employees to have favorable feelings to their organizations, and thus the individual higher in affective commitment will develop loyalty, affection, and belongingness to their organization, therein engendering a desire to stay at their organization (Jaros et al., 1993). Continuance commitment, however, forms from an employee’s perception of a lack of other employment alternatives, and fears of losing their jobs (Huselid & Day, 1991); as such, an individual higher in continuance commitment will stay with their organizations to avoid any risks associated with unemployment and to protect their resources. Finally, as employees develop feelings of obligation or felt responsibility toward the organization, they develop a sense of normative commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990). As such, the normatively committed individual will stay with their organization out of sense of duty to their organization, complying with the organizational norms. In sum, the high OC individual will show lack of intentions to turnover given their attachment to their employing organization because of strong emotional attachments (i.e., affective commitment), a sense of felt obligation to the organization (i.e., normative commitment), and/or perceptions of a lack of alternative employment and/or fear of losing resources (i.e., continuance commitment). Therefore, I hypothesize:

\[ \text{Hypothesis 2-b: OC will be negatively associated with turnover intentions.} \]

**Mediating Role of Work Commitment**

From the above, I propose that work commitment will mediate the relations between regulatory foci and turnover intentions. On the one hand, because prevention focused individuals are concerned with security, safety, and responsibility, a prevention-focused individual is
motivated to assure safety and non-losses, and align their actual self with their ought self. This drive for security and non-losses, in turn, will drive an attachment to their employing organization insofar as the organization helps satisfy these needs. This bond with the organization will in turn drive a desire to stay with the employing organization therein reducing intentions to turnover. As such, a prevention focused regulatory focus is expected to result in less intentions to turnover to maintain current resources, given an increased commitment to the employing organization.

*Hypothesis 3-a:* There will be a negative indirect effect of prevention focus on turnover intentions through OC.

On the other hand, because promotion focused individuals are concerned with advancement, growth, and accomplishment, a promotion-focused individual is motivated to achieve their ideal goal to align their ideal and actual selves. This drive for advancement and growth will result in the promotion focused individual being committed to their career as a way to encourage growth and self-development. However, given the changing nature of work wherein organizations can no longer be relied upon to provide career advancement (Direnzo & Greenhaus, 2011; Noordin et al., 2002; Shah, 2011), a career committed individual is likely to be willing to turnover to find opportunities that support their career goals. As such, a promotion focused regulatory focus is expected to result in more intentions to turnover through the focus on career advancement indicative of career commitment.

*Hypothesis 3-b:* There will be a positive indirect effect of promotion focus on turnover intentions through CC.
Current Study

The current study tests the aforementioned hypotheses (Figure 1) using a time-separated survey design. We separate the measurements of regulatory foci, work commitment, and turnover intentions to minimize concerns of common method variance, and capture the temporal ordering of the variables. This study makes several contributions. First, this study theoretically integrates regulatory foci with work commitment and turnover intentions. The propositions outlined above provide a novel perspective on understanding employee churn. Second, it demonstrates the mediating role of work commitment, particularly paying more attention to CC, between regulatory foci and turnover intentions. As mentioned earlier, few studies have considered CC directly in models of employee churn.

In addition, it draws practical implications for organizations by providing suggestions on how to retain and encourage competent employees while considering their individual differences. First, organizations can consider their potential employees’ career goals by suggesting specific career paths and visions for their growth and self-development. Second, organizations can also retain loyal employees by providing a sense of protection and security for their job in their organizations. Consequently, organizations can create and apply different strategies to their employees regarding their individual difference based on self-regulatory system. In such a way, they will be able to retain their competent employees as well as make greater improvement for themselves, their employees, and their society.
Method

Participants and procedures

This study sampled high-tech industry professionals, such as computer scientists, engineers, consultants, and product designers (e.g., UI/UX; Koslowsky, 2012) currently employed in the United States. This sample was selected for two main reasons. First, due to the high turnover rate within these professions (Chien & Chen, 2007), and the career ladder for these professionals is quite specific and systematic (Lin, 2017). For example, a junior software engineer gets promoted to a senior engineer, then to a lead engineer, and then to a development manager. Importantly, these promotions may not occur within the same organization (Lin, 2017). The sample was obtained from Prolific.co (www.prolific.co), an online crowdsourcing participant platform popular in research (Kothe & Ling, 2019).

Participants completed the measures in three waves of data collection. Responses were collected online using the Qualtrics Survey System. Respondents were paid $3 for each time point they completed, and additional $1.50 bonus payment for completing all three time points. Before data collection, a written informed consent was obtained from the participants, and they were assured data confidentiality. To maintain data confidentiality, each respondent was assigned a unique identifier code to link across the three time points.

Two-weeks separated the three measurement timepoint. This allowed me to assess the exogenous variables (regulatory foci) at time 1, the mediators (work commitment) at time 2, and the endogenous variable (turnover intentions) at time 3. However, each of the variables was collected at each timepoint to test for possible lagged effects.
A total of 183 participants started the survey, with 114 responses matched across the three time points (final response rate of 62.30%), and about 20% retention rate across the time points. The sample was predominantly male (71.9%) and Caucasian (68.4%), with an average age of 32.46 years (SD = 9.64).

Measures

**Self-regulatory focus.** Promotion and prevention focus was measured using the promotion and prevention focus questionnaire from Lockwood, Jordan, and Kunda (2002). The scale comprised 18 items, nine per regulatory focus. The items were scored on a 5-point scale (0 = Very untrue of me to 4 = Very true of me). An example item of prevention focus is “In general, I am focused on preventing negative events in my life” and an example of promotion focus is “I frequently imagine how I will achieve my hopes and aspirations.” (see Appendix A).

**Work Commitment.** Career commitment (CC) was measured two different ways. First, seven items from Blau’s (1985) measure were used. In addition, four career planning items from Carson and Bedeian’s (1994) measure were used. Although three out of four items were negatively worded, I decided to use the items because one item of the scale cannot effectively measure the construct. All items were rated on a 5-point scale (0 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree). An example item from Blau is “If I could get another job different from this one and paying the same amount, I would probably take it.” An example item from the career planning scale is “I do not identify specific goals for my development in this line of work/career field.” (see Appendix B & C)
Organizational Commitment (OC) was measured using the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). It originally consists of scales with six items for each component of commitment, scored on a 5-point scale (0 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree). After removing four negatively worded items as they can increase the amount of systematic random error in responses, change validity conclusion, and even measure different construct (Dalal & Carter, 2015), the final scale comprised 14 items: three affective commitment, six continuance commitment, and five normative commitment items. An example item of affective commitment is “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization”; an example item of continuance commitment is “Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire”, and an example item of normative item is “I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it” (see Appendix D).

**Turnover Intentions.** Turnover Intentions were measured using Jones and McIntosh’s (2010) three-item scales. Ratings were made on a 7-point scale (0 = Very unlikely to 6 = Very likely). An example item is: (1) “I frequently think about leaving my job” (see Appendix E).

**Demographic Information.** Finally, respondents reported gender, race, employment status, and age.

**Data Analyses**

Analyses were conducted in R (RStudio Team, 2022) using the lavaan (0.6-12; Rosseel, 2012), psych (2.2.5; Revelle, 2016), and Hmisc (4.7-0; Harrell, 2022) packages. First, internal consistency reliability estimates (Cronbach’s α), descriptive statistics, and variable
intercorrelations were computed for each measure at each time point (note, only estimates for analyzed time point included here). Following this, two-step structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted to test the main study hypotheses (Anderson & Gerbing, 1998). In step 1, construct discrimination was assessed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

Specifically, the fit of a fully oblique model was assessed to ensure that the items loaded on their respective constructs. In step 2, a structural model specifying the main study hypotheses was fit to the data. Global fit (i.e., model fit) as well as local fit (i.e. individual paths) were assessed (Zhu et al., 2017). Specifically, the hypothesized full mediation model was specified, and all indirect effects were defined and estimated using 10,000 resamples. Model fit was assessed using the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the Confirmatory Fit index (CFI; both values greater than .90), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Squared Root Mean Residual (SRMR; both values below .08).

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and the reliability estimates for each of the study variables.

Measurement Models

Overall, the measurement model showed subpart model fit (CFI = .76; TLI = .74; RMSEA = .08; 90% CI [.08, .09]; SRMR = .10). As table 2 showed, though, each item loaded on their respective factors except one item from prevention focus (“I see myself as someone who is primarily striving to become the self I “ought” to be—to fulfill my duties, responsibilities, and
obligations”). Although the overall fit of the model was not ideal, the main study hypotheses were tested in the structural model.
Table 1

Descriptive statistics, factor intercorrelations and reliabilities of variables

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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. RF_Pre</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2. RF_Pro</td>
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<td>.60</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3. OC_Aff</td>
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<td>1.09</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>4. OC_Con</td>
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<td>.96</td>
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<td>-.15</td>
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<td>5. OC_Nor</td>
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<td>1.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.64***</td>
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<td>6. CC_Blau</td>
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<td>.89</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.52***</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.46***</td>
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<td>7. CC_Plan</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>.54***</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.46***</td>
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<td>8. TI</td>
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<td>1.88</td>
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<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.62***</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.64***</td>
<td>-.65***</td>
<td>-.32***</td>
<td>(.93)</td>
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</table>

Note. N=114. RF_Pre = Prevention Focus; RF_Pro = Promotion Focus; OC_Aff = Affective Commitment; OC_Con = Continuance Commitment; OC_Nor = Normative Commitment; CC_Blau = Career Commitment (Blau, 1985); CC_Plan = Career Commitment_Career Planning (Carson & Bedeian, 1994).

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.
<table>
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<th>Construct</th>
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<th>Factor loadings</th>
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<td>RF_Prevention</td>
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*Note.* Goodness-of-fit indices (N = 114): $\chi^2_{1035} = 4153.43$ (p-value < 0.001); Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.77; Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMSR) = 0.09; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.083; Values below .08 for the RMSEA and SRMR and values above .90 for the CFI are considered acceptable fit (Weston & Gore, 2006).

**Structural model testing**

After the confirmatory factory analysis was completed, a structural model that reflects the model paths hypothesized in this study was tested as the second step of SEM. Overall, the model fit was not strong (CFI = .73; TLI = .71; RMSEA = .09 90% CI [.08, .10], SRMR = .15). Table 3 presents the paths of this study. Promotion focus is significantly and positively associated with career commitment ($\beta = .36, p < 0.05$ ; $.92, p < 0.001$) and prevention focus is significantly and positively associated with affective commitment ($\beta = -.45, p < 0.05$) and continuance commitment ($\beta = .62, p < 0.01$), but not with normative commitment. Therefore, hypothesis 1-a was supported, whereas 1-b was partially supported. However, none of the components of organizational commitment was significantly related to turnover intentions. The path between overall career commitment suggested by Blau (1985) and turnover intentions was significantly and negatively related to turnover intention ($\beta = -.94, p < 0.05$). However, the career planning component was not significantly and positively demonstrated to be related to turnover intentions.
As such, hypothesis 2-a was partially supported, whereas hypothesis 2-b was not supported (see Figure 2).

None of the indirect effects tested were significant. Specifically, prevention focus was not significantly indirectly related to turnover intentions through any component of organizational commitment (see Table 4). Likewise, promotion focus was not related to turnover intentions through either career commitment variables (Table 4). As such, Hypothesis 3 was not supported (see Figure 3).

Table 3
Path coefficients of the measurement

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<tr>
<th>Paths</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E</th>
<th>β</th>
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<tr>
<td>RF_Promotion → CC_Blau</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>RF_Promotion → CC_Planning</td>
<td>.92***</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF_Prevention → OC_Affective</td>
<td>-.45*</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>-.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>RF_Prevention → OC_Continuance</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>RF_Prevention → OC_Normative</td>
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<td>.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>OC_Normative → TI</td>
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<td>.11</td>
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<tr>
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<td>CC_Planning → TI</td>
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</table>

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
Table 4

Path coefficients of the full mediation

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<th>Paths</th>
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<th>β</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
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<td>.63</td>
<td>[-.04, .43]</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Affective Commitment → TI</td>
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<td>.11</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>[-.21, .20]</td>
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<td>2. Continuance Commitment → TI</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>[-.49, .01]</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Normative Commitment → TI</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>[-.12, .07]</td>
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</table>

Note. * p < .05.

Figure 2. Summarized test results for direct paths based on SEM analysis (*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001).
Figure 3. Summarized test results for significant indirect effect based on SEM analysis (*p < .05, ***p < .001).

Discussion

This study integrates regulatory foci (i.e., promotion and prevention focus) theory with theories of work commitment (i.e., organizational and career commitment) and turnover intentions to propose that individual differences in regulator focus differentially relate to organization and career commitment, and that these work commitment variables differentially relate to turnover intentions. Specially, I argued that employees with a prevention regulatory focus would be concerned with security, safety, and responsibility and motivated to assure safety and non-losses, and align their actual self with their ought self, therein relate to organizational commitment, whereas an employee with a promotion regulatory focus would be concerned with advancement, growth, and accomplishment and motivated to achieve their ideal goal to align their ideal and actual selves, therein relate to career commitment.

Furthermore, I argued that, whereas organizational commitment will lead to a reduce desire to turnover, career commitment would lead to an increased desired to turnover. As such, I
proposed that there would be a positive indirect effect of promotion focus on turnover, through career commitment, but a negative indirect effect of prevention focus on turnover.

To test these propositions, I used a three-wave observational design in which the exogenous variable was measured at time 1, the mediators at time 2, and the endogenous variable at time 3, and tested the indirect effect of regulatory foci on turnover intentions. Overall, most of the study hypotheses were unsupported, however. Supporting hypotheses 1a, I found a positive association between promotion focus and career commitment. I found a significant negative association between prevention focus and affective and significant positive association between prevention focus and continuance commitment, but non-significant association between prevention focus and normative commitment. This positive association indicates that a promotion-focused employee who is motivated to accomplish their ideal goals attempt to align their actual selves with their ideal selves. In addition, the promotion focused individual, showing more interest in their autonomous growth and self-development, will be committed to its career path. On the other hand, a prevention-focused employee, one who is motivated to satisfy their security needs and accomplish their ought goals that serve duties, obligations, and responsibilities with the attempt to align their actual selves with their ought selves, will not affectively attached to its organization, but will show continuance commitment to its organizations hoping to protect their position. This finding indicates that, as expected, prevention focus might not lead to a stronger emotional attachment to one’s organization. On the other hand, continuance commitment highlights safety needs with its job, therein aligning the prevention regulatory foci with this form of commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1991).
However, I did not find support for the paths between organizational commitment and turnover intentions. This is surprising given the body of literature showing strong negative associations between OC and turnover intentions. This may be attributable to the continuance commitment component whose associate with turnover intentions was nearly two times higher than affective and normative commitment (Table 3). Continuance commitment refers to the degree by which an employee believes that leaving the organizations would be costly. Employees with this commitment would decide either to leave or stay their organizations depending on how much it would cost. To put it differently, those with this commitment would have more utilitarian perspectives based on exchanges with the organization with an assumption that individuals invest in the organization by staking something they value (Becker, 1960). When seeing the job market trend for employees in certain vocations such as high-tech professionals, however, it seems they do not think leaving their organizations would be too costly according to the high turnover rate in the tech industry (e.g., 13.2%) (Stowe, 2020). Rather, they might think they would obtain more benefits from shifting their jobs as the job market for this vocation is largely and fast growing and there are highly increasing demands with these professions (Rayome, 2018). As such, it can be predicted that these professionals would be more likely to leave their organizations. Not only that, it can also be predicted that these employees would have less fear of losing their job, but would rather like to set higher goals to have more benefits and achieve them as they get promoted in their career path. This would also motivate them to leave their organizations. As such, to understand this research result different from past research results, I believe job characteristics should be importantly taken into considerations. In future research, therefore, it
seems possible to study positive path from continuance commitment to turnover intentions targeting these certain professionals. It might also bring important practical implications for their retention.

While I found a negative support for the path between Blau’s overall career commitment and turnover intentions, I did not find support for the path between career planning, a component of career commitment developed by Carson and Bedeian (1994), and turnover intentions. This suggests that it is not clear employees who are engaged in career planning are motivated to advance in their career, set career-related goals (Carson & Carson, 1998), and therefore leave their organizations to attain these goals. This result may be due to the scales used in this study. Both scales were developed almost three decades ago. Most items are negatively worded and the contents of items are more focused on the vocations within the organizations. As such, the items might have affected the survey validity. Therefore, in future research, this study can further be investigated with newly developed scales.

A significant indirect effect between regulatory foci and turnover intentions via work commitment was not supported as well. Although there was a positive relation between prevention focus and all components of organizational commitment, OC did not relate to turnover therein not mediating an effect of regulatory foci on turnover. This could mean that OC may not be a main factor that can explain why prevention-focused employees leave their organizations. Rather this could mean that prevention-focused employees can leave their organizations regardless of their commitment to organization, a different mediator may explain
the relation between prevention focus and turnover intentions, or the current design did not provide an adequate test of the propositions.

Likewise, the indirect effect between promotion focus and turnover intentions via career commitment was also not significant. Blau’s career commitment did not mediate the relation between promotion focus and turnover intentions. When it comes to the relation between career planning and turnover intentions, however, the indirect effect was close to significant. Therefore, although I cannot be certain whether a promotion-focused employee who has commitment with its career in terms of career path planning will leave its employing organization to promote itself for its career development, there is some evidence that this effect might be present and warrants future studies.
Theoretical Implications

Although the propositions were not supported, I believe this study takes the first important step in providing a novel perspective on understanding why employees leave their organizations, focusing on individual differences in regulatory focus, and how regulatory focus relates to distinct aspects of work commitment. The majority of past research has examined the relationship between overall organization commitment and turnover intentions or/and with career commitment as a moderator. However, this study provides important theoretical implications focusing on the relationship between different individuals and turnover intentions through work commitment as mediator. First, this study highlights individual differences as important factors based on regulatory focus theory. In other words, this study verifies promotion and prevention focus that should be considered to effectively predict work commitment.

Second, this study assesses work commitment, particularly career commitment, is an essential mediating factor that extends previous research that examined its role only as a moderator between organizational commitment and turnover intentions. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), studies of the moderator suggest testing its mediator effect at a more advanced stage of research. This gave me an idea to examine career commitment as a mediator. As such, this research confirms that career commitment will have significant mediating effect in the relation between promotion focus and turnover intentions.

Limitations and Future Directions

The first limitation of this study is that this study only targeted high-tech professionals in Unites States. This means that the findings and implications drawn herein may not generalize
beyond the population studied (Lin, 2017). Furthermore, the sampling also raises questions about whether the propositions are not accurate or if the sampling approach did not allow for the appropriate test of the propositions. In other words, it is possible that a sample from a different population of workers might support the propositions, and the technology industry represents a boundary condition. In addition, this study has a small sample size. Due to attrition across three-time points study, however, the final dataset collected was 114. A larger sample is likely required for stable estimates. As such, future studies should collect larger samples of more diverse occupational representation.

Second, model fit indices were ideal. According to Kenny (2020), fit refers to the ability of a model to reproduce the data (i.e., usually the variance-covariance matrix). As such, a good-fitting model is one that is reasonably consistent with the data so it does not necessarily require re-specifications. As noted above, this could mean that the proposed model here is not an accurate representation of how regulatory foci relate to turnover intentions. Future research should consider alternative models, in addition to testing the proposed model in different samples.

Third, combining limitations one and two, the small sample size may have resulted in an unstable model. The number of parameters estimated exceeded the power of the sample size (Kline, 2016). As such, the poor model fit might be related to a misspecified model, but might be the result of underpowered tests. In addition to collecting a larger sample, future studies can consider using complete aggregation or partial aggregation factor indication approaches (Kline, 2016).
Finally, the last limitation of this study is that turnover intention may not completely predict actual turnover behavior. Although this can be explained by theory of planned behavior, it would be very difficult to demonstrate that intention can be equal to actual behavior. Thus, future studies may need to investigate participants’ actual turnover behavior over time to complement the literature of turnover intention (Lin, 2017).

**Conclusion**

This study provided an explication for how each regulatory focus can be related to organizational and career commitment. The paths between promotion focus and career commitment was clear, as well as prevention focus and organizational commitment support the inference that regulatory focus differentially influences commitment to one’s career versus organization. However, this study did not support the positive path from career commitment to turnover intentions. Although this study did not find support for the indirect effect between regulatory foci and turnover intentions via both commitments, it took the first important step to integrate regulatory foci and work commitment theory and to examine each commitment as distinct mediator.

**Disclosure Statement**

This research was funded by University at Albany, State University of New York.
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Appendix A

Promotion/Prevention Focus Questionnaire

1. In general, I am focused on preventing negative events in my life.

2. I am anxious that I will fall short of my responsibilities and obligations.

3. I frequently imagine how I will achieve my hopes and aspirations.

4. I often think about the person I am afraid I might become in the future.

5. I often think about the person I would ideally like to be in the future.

6. I typically focus on the success I hope to achieve in the future.

7. I often worry that I will fail to accomplish my academic goals.

8. I often think about how I will achieve academic success.

9. I often imagine myself experiencing bad things that I fear might happen to me.

10. I frequently think about how I can prevent failures in my life.

11. I am more oriented toward preventing losses than I am toward achieving gains.

12. My major goal in school right now is to achieve my academic ambitions.

13. My major goal in school right now is to avoid becoming an academic failure.

14. I see myself as someone who is primarily striving to reach my “ideal self”—to fulfill my hopes, wishes, and aspirations.

15. I see myself as someone who is primarily striving to become the self I “ought” to be—to fulfill my duties, responsibilities, and obligations.

16. In general, I am focused on achieving positive outcomes in my life.

17. I often imagine myself experiencing good things that I hope will happen to me.
18. Overall, I am more oriented toward achieving success than preventing failure.

Appendix B

Career Commitment Questionnaire (Blau, 1985)

1. If I could get another job different from this one and paying the same amount, I would probably take it.

2. I definitely want a career for myself in this industry.

3. If I could do it all over again, I would not choose to work in this profession.

4. If I had all the money I needed without working, I would probably still continue to work in this field.

5. I like this vocation too well to give it up.

6. This is the ideal vocation for a work life.

7. I am disappointed that I ever entered this profession.

Appendix C

Career Planning Questionnaire (Carson & Bedeian, 1994)

1. I do not have a strategy for achieving my goals in this line of work/career field.

2. I have created a plan for my development in this line of work/career field.

3. I do not identify specific goals for my development in this line of work/career field.

4. I do not often think about my personal development in this line of work/career field.
Appendix D

Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ)

1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.

2. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.

3. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.

4. Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire.

5. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to.

6. Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization now.

7. I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization.

8. If I had not already put so much of myself into this organization, I might consider working elsewhere.

9. One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives.

10. Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my organization now.

11. I would feel guilty if I left my organization now.

12. This organization deserves my loyalty.

13. I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it.

14. I owe a great deal to my organization.
Appendix E

Turnover Intentions Questionnaire

1. I frequently think about leaving job.

2. The chance of me leaving my job in the next six months are high.

3. I am certain I will leave my job in the next year.