

# EFFECT OF AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT ON EMPLOYEES' INTENTIONS TO QUIT: MEDIATED BY JOB SEARCH BEHAVIOR

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Technology, Hisare-mail: [sandeephsb10@gmail.com](mailto:sandeephsb10@gmail.com)**ABSTRACT**

*The study aims at investigating the effect of affective commitment (AC) on intentions to quit (ITQ) through mediating effect of job search behavior (JSB). The current study was conducted based on 322 usable questionnaires collected from respondents working in companies operating in Ethiopia. The data were analyzed with the help of various statistical techniques including factor analyses, multiple regressions, structural equation modeling, and bootstrapping. The findings revealed that AC plays a significant role in predicting employees' ITQ. JSB is also significantly related to AC, ITQ and partially mediates the link between AC and ITQ. Managers should design jobs and create attractive and inspiring working conditions that will help employees to advance their capabilities and emotional attachment to the organization. This in turn helps managers and supervisors significantly reduce employee engagement in job search and turnover intention. HRM practices and more specifically AC and ITQ are currently untapped in the Ethiopian context. This is the first systematic study conducted particularly on AC and ITQ incorporating a large number of companies so far to the best knowledge of the researchers.*

**Keywords:** Affective Commitment, Job Search Behavior, Intentions to Quit, Ethiopian Corporate Sector, Mediation.

**INTRODUCTION**

Researchers were continually interested in explaining and predicting various aspects of human behavior that contribute to organizational performance. Numerous studies have explored the extent to which employee retention practices in the form of “supportive work environment” (Kundu and Lata, 2017) and “development and empowerment” (Kundu and Gahlawat, 2016) have a favorable effect on firm performance. As employees are a crucial source of expertise for business organizations (Blau *et al.*, 2008), business firms struggle to reduce voluntary turnover to

retain important employees with the required knowledge, skills, and abilities (Rao and Argote, 2006), that in turn help to improve organizational performance (Walsh and Taylor, 2007), and develop human resources as a competitive advantage (Qehaja and Kutillovci, 2015).

Organizational commitment is recognized as the strongest predictor of employees' intentional behaviors in the employee-employer relationship (Calisir *et al.*, 2011; Luz *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, strengthening employee commitment to the firm is also highly considered as a way to reduce employees' intentions to quit (ITQ) and on the job search behavior (JSB). Further, affective commitment (AC) is an effective way to alleviate the escalating problem of employees' ITQ (Christian and Ellis, 2014). For the past several decades, managing employees' low AC, engagement in JSB, and ITQ has been a critical challenge for organizations (Haque *et al.*, 2019). However, despite extensive research base on a variety of turnover antecedents in the literature, relatively few studies have considered AC as an antecedent to JSBs (Peachey *et al.*, 2014).

Through an exhaustive review of literature, one can find a lot of researches that indicate the influence of AC on ITQ (Christian and Ellis, 2014; Pare and Tremblay, 2007). Most of these research outputs were inclined to developed countries and a few of them towards Asia. As regards to Ethiopian context, a limited number of research outputs (Semela, 2004; Kinde and Kaur, 2018) were found related to the issues in the current study. This is the first systematic study conducted particularly on AC and ITQ incorporating a large number of companies so far to the best knowledge of the researchers. Therefore, the present study intends to investigate the effect of AC on employees' ITQ, and the mediating effect of JSB in the AC-ITQ relationship.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

In this part of the paper, we first discuss the existing works of literature about direct relationships among AC and ITQ, AC and JSB, and JSB and ITQ. Further, it highlights the direct and indirect relationships among AC, JSB, and ITQ.

### AC and ITQ

Organizational commitment has been defined as the relative strength of an individual's

identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Mowday *et al.*, 1979, p. 226). Though commitment has three dimensions, being the most significant antecedent of organizationally preferred behaviors such as employee ITQ, AC has been the prime focus for most empirical studies of organizational commitment (Rhoades *et al.*, 2001). Several empirical studies (e.g. Christian and Ellis, 2014; Gyensare *et al.*, 2017; Haque *et al.*, 2019; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer *et al.*, 2002) have linked AC and employees' ITQ negatively. Similarly, Pare and Tremblay (2007) revealed that both affective and continuance commitment have a negative influence on turnover intentions, while Biswas (2015) found only AC as the strongest predictor of turnover intention. In line with the prior study results, the following hypothesis is developed:

**H1:** AC has a significantly negative effect on employees' ITQ.

### AC and JSB

Employees make a thorough evaluation of the status of their attachment to the organization to decide whether to seek alternative employment or stay in the organization (Vandenberghe and Bentein, 2009). Employees with less loyalty (which is one aspect of AC) to their organizations tend to engage more in JSBs (Lee and Mowday, 1987). Bretz *et al.* (1993) have found that organizational commitment as an internal factor is highly associated with JSBs than external or pull factors. As the emotional attachment diminishes, employees, develop a propensity to engage in JSBs (Peachey *et al.*, 2014). AC is related to several behavioral outcomes; most notably inversely related to intention to search for job alternatives (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Moreover, the study outputs of Blau (1994) and have also exhibited a negative effect of organizational commitment on JSBs. Therefore, we proposed the underneath hypothesis:

**H2:** AC is significantly and negatively related to JSB

### JSB and ITQ

A large body of turnover literature has posited the significance of job-related behaviors and outcomes as a predictor of employees' voluntary turnover. However, JSB has not been given considerable attention particularly as an antecedent of ITQ. Employees' JSB, followed by ITQ, has been

considered an integral part of the turnover process (Mobley, 1977). A meta-analytical analysis conducted by Hom *et al.* (1992) undeniably supported a succession of JSB and its correlated ITQ in predicting employees' turnover. Paillé *et al.* (2015) found JSB to be a significant predictor of intention to leave the employer and intention to leave the profession. Peters *et al.* (1981) explained that if JSB results in positive employment possibilities outside the organization, employee's intention to leave the organization gets strengthened. Therefore, the current study hypothesized:

**H3:** Employees' JSB has a significant and positive relationship with ITQ.

### AC, JSB, and ITQ

JSB and ITQ are immediate antecedents for actual turnover than attitudes such as organizational commitment (Kopelman *et al.*, 1992). However, most turnover researches have not included JSB and intention to leave simultaneously; making their relative effects unachieved empirical objective (Blau, 1993). Meyer and Allen (1991) elaborated that employees' decision to stay or quit the firm largely depends on organizational commitment. Employees with higher organizational commitment tend to stay at their jobs and endeavor to work for the benefit of the organization (Meyer *et al.*, 2004). Knight and Leimer (2010) have stated that when employees perceive they can leave as they do not emotionally connect to the organization, they are most likely intend to quit. Further, they explained that employees' lack of satisfaction leads to intentions to a committed job search and then to quit. Hence, in line with the above literature, we devised the underneath hypothesis:

**H4:** The relationship between AC and ITQ is significantly mediated by JSB.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Sample and Procedures

The current study applied a cross-sectional survey design based on which 425 questionnaires were administered. Out of the total distributed questionnaires, 342 survey responses were received and 322 of them found valid responses for further analysis. This resulted in a response rate of 76 per cent which was quite acceptable (Baruch, 1999). As Amharic is working language in Ethiopia, the

English version of the initial survey was translated into Amharic with the aid of Ethiopian HR specialists with good command on English. The Amharic version was translated back into English by different HR experts, ensuring its consistency and reliability. Further, to assure accuracy and consistency, the comparison was made between the translated and original versions (Akhtar *et al.*, 2008; Brislin, 1970). Out of the total respondents, 73 per cent of them were males and 27 per cent were females. The majority (41 per cent) of the respondents were found in the age range of 31 to 40. Respondents were also grouped in terms of their experience. Hence, 29.8 per cent of the employees had experience of more than 10 years, while 24.2 per cent, 21.1 per cent, and 22.2 per cent of the respondents had 1-3, 4-6, and 7-10 years of work experience respectively.

### Measures

All the three constructs were measured on a "five-point Likert scale" ranging from 1 to 5 i.e. 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". The scale items may be seen in table 1.

### Affective Commitment

To measure AC i.e. employees' affective attachment to the organization, we relied on the six-item scales of Meyer *et al.* (1993) and Rego and Souto (2004) with some modification. The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was 0.846.

### Job Search Behavior

To measure the construct of JSB, we relied on the high loading nine-items scale adapted from Blau (1994). The Cronbach's alpha value for this measure was found to be 0.902.

### Intentions to Quit

The three items for this scale were adapted from Yavas *et al.* (2003). The Cronbach's alpha for this construct was 0.896.

### Control Variables

Gender, age, and work experience of respondents were considered control variables. The age of the respondents was categorized into six categories. Whereas male and female were the two categories of gender. Job experience of the respondents was categorized as <1 year, 1-3, 4-6, 7-10, and > 10 years.

**Statistical Tools**

In this study, the data analysis was conducted using statistical tools like factor analysis, regression, and structural equation modeling (SEM), and bootstrapping. The correlation analysis examined the linear relationships among the variables, namely AC, JSB, and ITQ. Before applying SEM, we estimated the composite reliability (CR) and discriminant validity of the constructs. Moreover, the model fit measured through computing the values of indices like  $\chi^2/df$  (Chi-square goodness-of-fit to degrees of freedom ratio), comparative fit index (CFI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI). The rule of thumb for  $\chi^2/df$  is less than 5.0 (Wheaton *et al.*, 1977), a cutoff point for RMSEA is less than 0.1 (Fabrigar *et al.*, 1999). According to Hu and Bentler (1999), a threshold for TLI, CFI, and GFI is greater than 0.9.

**Common Method Bias Testing**

The analysis for the study was done based on the primary data collected through self-reporting questionnaires. Using a single data collection instrument may cause common method bias problem. However, adhering to the suggestion of Podsakoff *et al.* (2003), some precautionary measures were employed. Confidentiality of the responses was declared to reduce the tendency of socially desirable responses, and then questionnaire items representing independent and dependent variables were placed apart to avoid deliberately matched responses. Moreover, as suggested by Harman’s (1976), all items of the three constructs were loaded as one factor using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the model was ill-fitted ( $\chi^2/df = 13.041$ , CFI = 0.729, GFI = 0.633, TLI = 0.680, and RMSEA = 0.194). Based on these indices and pieces of evidence, common method bias is not the concern for the study.

**RESULTS**

This section provides the preliminary results done through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Subsequently, the analysis indicates the investigated causal relationships existed between AC and ITQ as independent and dependent variables with a mediating effect of JSB through regression analysis.

**Factor Analytic Results**

Before the causal effect analyses, eighteen variables representing AC, JSB, and ITQ were subject to a factor analysis with varimax rotation. The factors were retained sticking to the criterion with an eigenvalue greater than 1.00. The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) resulted in three retained factors. The extracted three factors had eigenvalues of 8.817, 3.109, and 1.006, counting for 71.84per cent of the variance. Table 1 reveals EFA and CFA loadings alongside statistical results from the first-order confirmatory analysis. Consequently, three construct factors produced through EFA with loadings ranging 0.618 to 0.891 were also subjected to first-order CFA to determine the validity of data through the help of Amos version 21.0. As a result, the average variance extracted (AVE) and CR for all the three constructs were above the edge of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively. Further, CR values for each construct were higher than the AVE value of each construct. This result assured the convergent validity of the data (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The calculated maximum shared variance (MSV) and average shared variance (ASV) were much lower than the AVE values of their respective constructs. According to Chauhan (2015), AVE value of greater than 0.5 and higher than MSV and ASV is a good rule of thumb suggesting discriminant validity.

**Table 1: EFA, CFA for AC, JSB and ITQ**

Factors	Factor Loadings (EFA)	Factor Loadings (CFA)	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Maximum Shared Variance	Average Shared Variance
<b>Affective commitment (five items)</b>			<b>.846</b>	<b>.845</b>	<b>.522</b>	<b>.090</b>	<b>.077</b>
I feel as if problems of this firm are mine.	.800	.781					
This firm has a personal meaning for me.	.781	.742					
I have a strong affection for this organization	.774	.668					
I want to spend my whole career with this firm.	.751	.753					
I feel like “part of the family” at my organization.	.744	.661					
I proudly tell others about my membership of this firm.	.618	*					
<b>Job search behavior (six items)</b>			<b>.902</b>	<b>.911</b>	<b>.769</b>	<b>.599</b>	<b>.332</b>
I contacted an employment agency, executive search firm, or state employment service.	.891	.905					

I listed myself as a job applicant in a newspaper, journal or professional association.	.865	.882					
I discussed with previous employers about the potential job leads.	.862	.881					
I used internal resources to generate potential job leads.	.831	.877					
I read a lot about getting new job.	.881	.865					
I filled out a job application.	.831	.850					
I sent my resume to potential employers.	.830	*					
I searched job through internet, ads or search engines	.806	*					
I talked with friends or relatives about possible job leads.	.798	*					
<b>Intentions to quit (three items)</b>			<b>.896</b>	<b>.898</b>	<b>.746</b>	<b>.599</b>	<b>.345</b>
I usually think to resign.	.738	.895					
It is not hard for me to resign from this organization	.814	.789					
Soon I am considering to look for other job.	.696	.902					

Notes: Items with (\*) symbol were excluded from CFA due to poor factor loadings.

So as to empirically test whether model fits the data for further analysis to produce a causal relationship among employees' AC, JSB, and ITQ, we applied a first order factor model. As a result, the confirmatory factor analysis revealed good values for baseline fit model. Thus, the values of the model indices were;  $\chi^2/df = 2.784$ , with a chi-square of 206.04,  $df = 74$ ,  $GFI = 0.916$ ,  $TLI = 0.953$ ,  $CFI = 0.961$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.070$ . Moreover, the baseline model was tested against two other alternate models (see table 2). First, one-factor model depicted a poor fit with a chi-square of= 1004.191,  $df = 77$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 13.041$ ,  $GFI = 0.633$ ,  $TLI = 0.680$ ,  $CFI = 0.729$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.194$ . Then, two-factor model also showed bad fit with chi-square values of 469.26,  $df = 76$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 6.174$ ,  $GFI = 0.811$ ,  $TLI = 0.862$ ,  $CFI = 0.885$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.127$ . Therefore, all the other models were not as good as the three factor (baseline) model.

**Table 2: First Order CFA Generating Alternative Models**

Models	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
One-factor model	1004.191	77	13.041	.633	.680	.729	.194
Two-factor model	469.259	76	6.174	.811	.862	.885	.127
Three-factor model (Baseline model)	206.045	74	2.784	.916	.953	.961	.070

Source: Primary Data

**Descriptive Statistics**

Table 3 reveals means and standard deviations of each variable and correlations between predicting and outcome variables. The results of correlations supported the hypothesized relationship between perceived AC with JSB and ITQ, indicating the significant and inverse relationship between the variables ( $r = -0.235$  and  $r = -0.262$ ;  $p \leq 0.01$  respectively). The result also indicates a significantly positive relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable ( $r = 0.711$ ;  $p \leq 0.01$ ). From the controlling variables, the age and job experience of the respondents were significant. Since there is no high correlation found among independent variables, the chance of multicollinearity is very low.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics**

Items	No of items	Means	Std. D	1	2	3	4	5	6
Gender	-	1.27	.446	1					
Age	-	2.88	1.048	-.249**	1				
Experience	-	3.52	1.221	-.317**	.604**	1			
AC	5	3.83	.769	.031	.205**	.337**	1		
JSB	6	2.41	1.087	-.023	-.207**	-.223**	-.235**	1	
ITQ	3	2.60	1.120	.021	-.139*	-.207**	-.262**	.711**	1

Notes:

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

AC- Affective commitment

JSB- Job search behavior

ITQ- Intentions to quit

Source: Primary data

**Regression Results**

As depicted in Table 4, model 1 included only the control variables. In model 2, JSB was regressed on AC and had a significant and negative effect on AC ( $\beta = -0.160$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ), thus, supporting hypothesis

H<sub>2</sub>. In model 3, ITQ was regressed on JSB and the result was found significantly positive ( $\beta = 0.703$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). Therefore, hypothesis H<sub>3</sub> was supported. The regression result in model 4 revealed an inverse relationship between AC and employees'

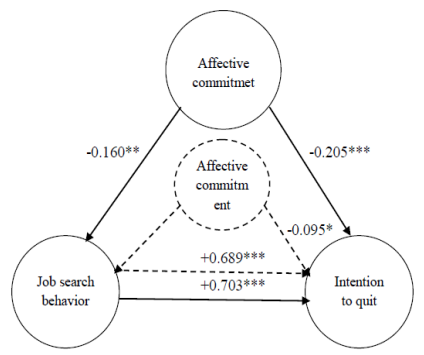
ITQ ( $\beta = -0.205, p \leq 0.001$ ). Thus, hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> also got a support. Finally, the result in model 5, where ITQ was regressed on AC and JSB concomitantly, revealed that JSB was a strong antecedent of ITQ ( $\beta = 0.689, p \leq 0.001$ ) and the

association between AC and employees' ITQ through JSB was reduced (from  $\beta = -0.205, p \leq 0.001$  to  $\beta = -0.095, p \leq 0.05$ ). This implies that JSB partially mediates the relationship between AC and ITQ. Thus, hypothesis H<sub>4</sub> was supported.

**Table 4: Regression Results Testing the Mediating Effect Of Job Search Behavior**

Predicting Variables	Dependent Variables				
	Job Search Behavior		Intentions to Quit		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Gender	-.068	-.098	.020	-.033	.034
Age	-.042	-.130	-.052	-.036	.053
Education	-.108	-.069	.051	-.092	-.044
Experience	-.209**	-.125	-.078	-.131	-.045
Affective commitment	—	<b>-.160**</b>	—	<b>-.205***</b>	<b>-.095*</b>
Job search behavior	—	—	<b>.703***</b>	—	<b>.689***</b>
R <sup>2</sup>	.057	.098	.514	.093	.521
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.045	.083	.506	.079	.512
F Statistic	4.774***	6.833***	66.726***	6.484***	57.143***
N	322	322	322	322	322

Notes: \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$   
Source: Primary data



Notes:  
\*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$   
— indicates the direct relationships  
± represent the direction of relationships  
----- shows the mediating effect

**Figure 1: Final Model Showing Regression Results**

**Bootstrap Results**

Table 5 indicates the indirect relationship between the AC and ITQ through JSB as mediator was estimated using a bootstrap procedure. Bootstrap results with 5000 re-samples; bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) suggested that the indirect effect

of AC on ITQ was significant at 95per cent confidence interval as recommended (Hayes and Rockwood, 2020); did not contain zero at all (lower level = -0.383; upper level = -0.109). This effect was significant (\*\* $p \leq 0.001$ ), thus, hypothesis H<sub>4</sub> was confirmed.

**Path Analysis Results**

Table 6 shows the structural path results. AC significantly and negatively affected employees' ITQ ( $\beta = -0.303, p \leq 0.001$ ). Hence, H<sub>1</sub> was reconfirmed. AC significantly and negatively affected JSB ( $\beta = -0.254, p \leq 0.001$ ). Therefore, H<sub>2</sub> was reconfirmed. JSB significantly and positively affected employees' ITQ ( $\beta = 0.746, p \leq 0.001$ ). Therefore, H<sub>3</sub> was reconfirmed. Next, the results show that the indirect effect of AC on employees' ITQ through JSB was also significant but reduced (from  $\beta = -0.303, p \leq 0.001$  to  $\beta = -0.110, p \leq 0.05$ ). Therefore, it was concluded that JSB partially mediated the effect of AC on employees' ITQ. Therefore, H<sub>4</sub> was reconfirmed.

**Table 6: Path of Structural Model**

Model	Direct effect model	Partial mediation model
Affective commitment → intentions to quit	-0.303***	
<b>After mediator variable (job search behavior) enter into the model</b>		
Affective commitment → job search behavior		-0.254***
Job search behavior → intentions to quit		0.746***
Affective commitment → job search behavior → intentions to quit		-0.110*

Source: Primary data

## DISCUSSION

In the current dynamic economic environment and fierce competition among business firms, organizations need to please their customers through products and services that meet the ever-changing customers' needs. This requires retaining their highly committed employees and/or lessening their intentions to leave the organization. Thus, the purpose of our study was to explore the antecedents of ITQ among corporate sector employees in Ethiopia and investigate the degree of the causal effect among employee outcome (AC), JSB (mediator), and the subsequent quitting intentions. Inspired by gaps in the commitment-quitting intentions literature particularly in the study area, we studied the mediating effect of JSB in the AC and ITQ the relationship.

The current study, hypothesizing a negative association between AC and ITQ, found that AC had a significant inverse effect on ITQ. This result is indorsed by many researchers. Vandenberghe and Bentein (2009), taking three independent samples to make a closer look at the relationship between AC and turnover intention, found that AC has a significant negative effect on turnover intentions. Prior studies (Flinkman *et al.*, 2010; Rhoades *et al.*, 2001) have found AC as an important predictor of employee retention. This signifies employees' ITQ is negatively affected by their emotional attachment to the organization. This result was also supported by the study examining the causal relationship by employing structural equation modeling that found a very strong inverse effect of commitment on employees' ITQ (Elangovan, 2000).

In most literature related to employee behaviors, there is substantial emphasis on investigating the influence of work-related outcomes on employee turnover. Though it is a widely studied work-related outcome, employees' AC has a weak direct effect on turnover (Shukla *et al.*, 2013). Rather lack of commitment can lead to an ITQ or, through a different path, absence of commitment may direct to committed JSB and then to quit intentions (Knight and Leimer, 2010). Peachey *et al.* (2014) revealed a significant negative association between JSB and ITQ. The current study's regression and path analysis result reveal the relationship between AC and ITQ is significantly mediated by employees' JSB. Prior research found that work-related factors like job insecurity results in lower organizational commitment (De Cuyper and De

Witte, 2005), which then leads to JSB (King, 2000) and employees' ITQ (Williams, 2003).

## IMPLICATIONS

The study findings contribute on the one hand to empirical literature building and practical implications for the organization on the other. The critical importance of this study finding lays in the mediating effect of JSB in the AC and ITQ the relationship. The study also forwards some implications for organizational representatives. The study results revealed that creating the environment by which employees perceive they are emotionally attached to the organization is significantly reduces the tendency of a search for an alternative job which in turn is linked to reducing another unwanted organizational outcome i.e. ITQ. Managers need to exert sufficient efforts on retention mechanism towards employees with a less organizational commitment to control the high cost (Peachey *et al.*, 2014) and loss of productivity (Tse *et al.*, 2013) resulted from the job search and quit intention.

## LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Having double-sided significance does not make the study cleansed from any limitation. This study has some limitations based on which it suggests prospective directions for advanced future study. First, employing a cross-sectional survey was the main limitation that is not preferable to determine causal linkages among constructs (Harley *et al.*, 2007). Forthcoming researchers may, therefore, pursue a longitudinal design to get better linkages among the study variables. Moreover, the study has been conducted based on primary data collected through a self-reporting questionnaire, making it possible that a common method bias may exist (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). However, the Harman one-factor test revealed that it was not an issue in this study. Yet, future researchers are advised to take precautions before collecting data as suggested by Podsakoff *et al.* (2003).

On the other hand, only one predicting variable (AC) has been used in determining its effect on the ITQ through JSB. Future studies can investigate different combinations of structural antecedents (perceived supervisor support, job satisfaction, procedural justice, etc.) to explore the findings in-depth.

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