



Organisational support as a moderator between emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions

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Orientation: The study of food industry workers experiencing emotional exhaustion (EE) and their views on organisational support (OS) becomes a crucial concept of turnover research.

Research purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore how OS influences EE and turnover intentions (TI) among employees in the food industry.

Motivation for the study: High turnover and burnout are common workplace problems that reduce productivity and increase operating costs. Organisational support could help to alleviate EE and reduce the likelihood of employees leaving their jobs.

Research design, approach and method: A convenience sample of 385 permanent South African employees from the food sector was included in the study. The measurement instruments used were the Turnover Intention Scale, the Emotional Exhaustion Scale and the Organisational Support Scale. A hierarchical regression analysis was used to determine the effect of OS on EE and turnover.

Main findings: The results show that EE is related positively to TI. The findings imply that OS is negatively associated with EE and TI. Furthermore, the findings revealed that OS moderated the relationship between EE and TI among individuals with a high OS.

Practical/managerial implications: Organisational support is a resource that could buffer EE levels and reduce TI. Human resource managers could use these results to improve and reduce EE levels.

Contribution/value-add: This study shows how OS reduces EE in the food industry, improves employee well-being and increases productivity.

Keywords: organisational support; emotional exhaustion; turnover intention; conservation of resource theory; food industry.

Introduction

Despite the plethora of studies on emotional exhaustion (EE), the reason why EE fuels the desire to leave the organisation has received less attention (Knudsen, Ducharme & Roman 2009; Pathardikar et al. 2023; Srivastava et al. 2024). In recent years, the notion of employee turnover has been intensively addressed in industrial and organisational psychology and organisational behaviour (Sharif et al. 2021). Labour turnover refers to whether an employee intends to quit in response to a circumstance, even if not immediately, and it is the most detrimental effect of emotional tiredness (Demerouti & Bakker 2011; Silva 2022). Emotional exhaustion refers to a high degree of emotional tiredness, resulting from an extended duration of physical, emotional and cognitive stress that workers experience (Saleh et al. 2023). Previous research has shown that role expectations, uncontrolled continuous stress at work, insufficient resources, monotony of work and inadequate support are the main causes of stress (Silva 2022). Stress can lead to adverse psychological effects, including poor health and absenteeism (Maslach & Jackson 1998), reduced productivity and job satisfaction (Demerouti & Bakker 2011) and increased employee turnover (Knudsen et al. 2009). Abugre and Acquah (2022) claim that increased employee turnover can affect a company's growth and performance because of potential organisational setbacks.

Emotional exhaustion, a fundamental aspect of burnout, has been thoroughly studied regarding its many effects on the workplace, including turnover intention (TI). Studies have repeatedly shown that emotionally exhausted workers are more likely to consider leaving their organisations because of the psychological distress associated with prolonged work stress (Halbesleben & Buckley 2004;

Lee & Ashforth 1996; Wright & Cropanzano 1998). Given the established relationship between EE and TI, it is important to examine elements that may mitigate this relationship, particularly in high-stress work environments such as the food service sector. Organisational support is an important but under-researched element in this interaction. Although previous research has examined the direct effects of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, leadership style and organisational culture on TI (Eisenberger et al. 1986; Tett & Meyer 1993), few studies specifically examine the role of OS in mediating the relationship between EE and TI. Organisational support, which is characterised by employees feeling that their organisation values their contribution and that it cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al. 1986), may act as a protective factor that mitigates the detrimental effects of EE. This research aims to extend previous work by examining the moderating effect of OS on the relationship between EE and TI in a South African food industry work setting context.

South African food industry work context

The food manufacturing industry in South Africa employs around 288 000 people (representing 21% of the manufacturing industry's workforce). In addition, the industry has contributed around R80.9 billion (approximately US\$4.5 billion), which is 21% of the manufacturing gross domestic product (GDP) and roughly 2.7% of South Africa's total GDP (Republic of South Africa 2018). According to Mercer Selected Intelligence (Mercer 2017), the worldwide average rate of voluntary labour turnover is 4.7%. According to South African statistics data from 2019, the average employee turnover rate in most industries was between 5% and 10% (Adcorp Holdings 2021). Although a lack of skills in the food sector is a significant problem in South Africa, employees may experience the effects of organisational systems, depersonalisation, physical environment, work role and organisational climate, which Liu et al. (2019) mention are factors that relate to the work environment and are considered necessary for an employee's intention to leave the organisation. A study conducted by Schlechter, Syce and Bussin (2016) in various occupational work environments in South Africa showed that more than 66% of office-based employees might be experiencing excessive stress, anxiety and depression, with the overall national average labour turnover rate of 57.3% in 2020 and the average labour turnover in the manufacturing industry ranging from 30.6% in 2017 to 44.2% in 2020 (Marshall & Stephenson 2020). However, labour turnover is usually affected by a variety of factors such as stress, burnout and OS (Liu et al. 2019). Emotionally exhausted food industry workers who work in poor conditions and lack support as well as sufficient energy to carry out their activities may wish to leave their employer organisation as a way of facing this loss of energy (Lopez-Cabarro 2021). While Liu et al. (2019) conducted their study in the nursing work environment, similar relationships have not been extensively explored in the food services industry. Given the unique stressors and high turnover rates in food services, it is crucial to demonstrate how OS may function differently in this

setting. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effect of OS on the relationship between EE and TI in the South African food industry sector.

Theoretical perspective

The Conservation of Resource (COR) Theory and the Organisational Support Theory (OST) were utilised as conceptual frameworks to comprehend the effect of OS on the relationship between EE and TI (Eisenberger et al. 1986; Hobfoll & Wells 1998). The OST evaluates the evolution, characteristics and results of perceived organisational support (POS) (Baran, Shanock & Miller 2012; Rhoades & Eisenberger 2002; Shore, Barksdale & Shore 1995). According to the hypothesis, workers acquire POS in reaction to socio-emotional needs and the organisation's willingness to recognise and reward increasing efforts on its behalf (Eisenberger et al. 1986; Mathebula & Mitonga-Monga 2022; Rhoades & Eisenberger 2002). The OS theory extends the social exchange theory to the employer-employee relationship (Aselage & Eisenberger 2003). Hence, OST principles are built on the norms of reciprocity, where workers are willing to exchange their effort and commitment to the employer organisation for a concrete incentive (i.e. extrinsic reward, fringe benefits and emotional rewards like esteem, approbation and care) (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber 2011). Workers who consider their organisation to be supportive, appreciating their contributions and caring about their well-being, are more likely to feel obligated to fulfil the employer's objectives and reduce stress and withdrawal, absenteeism and turnover (Kurtessis et al. 2017).

Consequently, the COR theory elaborates on the rationale that explains the effects of the workplace on emotional tiredness (Chun et al. 2022; Hobfoll & Wells 1998). The capacity to study numerous variables that influence the link between perceived EE and TI and the subsequent results is one of the main benefits of adopting the COR theory. The COR theory emphasises emotional and physical resources (Allen, Peltokorpi & Rubenstein 2016; Xia et al. 2019). According to Allen et al. (2016), these two categories of resources each have a different role in forecasting an employee's work-related outcomes. Emotional energy depicts the amount and length of effort that an individual spends in his or her work, while physical strength reflects one's entire potential to do one's job (Quinn, Spreitzer & Lam 2012). The COR theory is founded on the motivating concept that individuals try to earn and safeguard their resources and social resources, while they suffer stress when adverse conditions develop. Workers who have access to more resources than their peers are in a stronger position than those who do not. In other words, workers with sufficient resources are able to resist stress, maintain tight relationships and manage emergencies.

In contrast, workers who lack resources are likely to perceive the possibility of resource loss in the workplace, which means that they may lack the resources to satisfy job expectations and be unable to withstand chronic stress (Marchand & Vandenberghe 2016). According to Hobfoll and Wells 1998,

resources are objects or personal attributes, conditions or energy, which an individual values or that serve as a way of acquiring these objects. For instance, workers in the food industry may encounter similar phenomena in a variety of scenarios, including labour overload, poor working conditions, extremely demanding jobs and a lack of organisation and co-worker support (Silva 2022). This might cause individuals to suffer greater degrees of EE and raise their desire to leave the organisation.

Turnover intention

Turnover intention refers to an employee's deliberate consideration or willingness to leave their current organisation (Hom et al. 2012, 2017). Turnover intention is characterised as the cognitive process of contemplating resignation and actively seeking alternative employment opportunities (Cicek, Turkmenoglu & Ozbilgin 2021). Because TI denotes an employee's desire to leave the employer organisation for better working prospects, the immediate phase before leaving is the intention to depart, which is commonly seen as the intention to leave the employer within the next 6 months (Mathebula & Mitonga-Monga 2022; Rubenstein et al. 2019). Rajput and Kumari (2023) contend that an individual who intends to leave the employer portrays actual leaving behaviour. Individual employees may be willing to quit their employer organisation for several reasons, which include retirement, unfair labour practices, inadequate salary and working conditions, lack of competent supervision and support, lack of career growth and promotional chances and unfairness (Markham & Gobind 2022). Based on previous studies by Fried et al. (2008), role stress was found to have a moderate association with the intention to leave.

Furthermore, lack of good working conditions, inadequate pay, lack of support and job dissatisfaction are key factors that contribute to employee TI; in other words, these factors are inversely related to TI, as they often drive employees to consider leaving their organisation (Cicek et al. 2021). Employee turnover can be quite costly for employer organisations, as it affects the strategic objectives and competitiveness, resulting in additional costs of hiring and training new employees (Yang et al. 2022; Zhang et al. 2023). Employee turnover may be devastating for the employer if they lose competent employees, not only because they cannot replace them but also because they must train and advise newly hired workers to match the job and contribute to the organisation's goals (Hou et al. 2021; Sun & Wang 2017). Employer organisations can reduce intention to leave by developing a high-performing culture (Markham & Gobind 2022), creating an ethical climate (Mitonga-Monga 2020) and providing a positive organisational justice characterised by fair human resource practices (Sharma & Tiwari 2023). This study examined TI with EE.

Emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is described as a significant element of career burnout that often occurs when an individual's

emotional resources are depleted because of experiencing stressful circumstances (Sun & Ma 2022). Maslach and Goldberg (1998:64) define EE as 'feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources'. Shah et al. (2022) posit that working conditions, especially psychological aspects, are detrimental because they can either stimulate or impede an employee's well-being and lead to withdrawal, disruptive behaviour and fuel intention to leave, which may affect organisational goal achievement. As an individual's emotional resources, EE may occur for multiple reasons (Maslach & Jackson 1981). Firstly, several researchers have argued that EE is a critical element of burnout (Knudsen et al. 2009; Maslach, Jackson & Leiter 1996; Schaufeli & Taris 2005). Secondly, there is evidence that EE precedes the development of other components of burnout (Toppinen-Tanner, Kalimo & Mutanen 2002). Emotional exhaustion also has adverse health implications (Taris 2006) and has been linked to mediocre performance (Cropanzano, Rupp & Byrne 2003).

Furthermore, EE may spread to other organisational members (Halbesleben & Buckley 2004). In addition, EE can lead to several negative work-related physical and psychological outcomes such as high turnover, absenteeism, poor sleep, demotivation and role conflict (Park, Rhee & Lee 2021). Employer organisations must initiate a quality relationship and support good working conditions and a positive organisational atmosphere, which may help employees regulate their feelings and emotional competence when responding to their job demands (Ali et al. 2022). Implying regulating their feelings and emotional competence, employees will experience resource balances, leading to a low level of EE, low feedback avoidance and a prominent level of performance (Rajput & Kumari 2023). In contrast, if employees experience an important level of EE and then attempt to avoid feedback and portray unproductive behaviours (Korunka et al. 2008), all lead to job burnout from excessive job demands caused by negative employee behaviours such as absenteeism and TI (Shah et al. 2022). Employees who are aware of personal dysfunction owing to perceived conditions or events in the workplace are likely to experience an elevated level of occupational stress, which, in turn, would lead to a higher TI (Hills 2019).

Perceived organisational support

Perceived organisational support is a construct of interest for both human resource practitioners and academics (Kurtessis et al. 2017). Organisational support is understood as an employee's overarching belief regarding the degree to which their organisation values their contributions and prioritises their well-being (Eisenberger et al. 1986). Employees' perceptions about the degree to which the employer values their well-being are entrenched, like the exchange relationship between the employee and employer (Zhai, Wang & Weadon 2020). Similarly, Mathebula and Mitonga-Monga (2022) postulate that employees are in an exchange relationship with the organisation for expected rewards for which they strive. The OST states that when the employer provides emotional or

social support to their employees so that their needs are fulfilled, positive outcomes will emerge for both the employer and the employee (Eisenberger et al. 1986). Based on the exchange relationship mechanisms, employer organisations should support employees who are willing to trade their efforts to help them (Blau 1960; Mitonga-Monga 2020). This theory emphasises that employees who evaluate their employer's policies, procedures and actions develop a broader view of the steps adopted by the employer are favourable for employees. For example, if the employer's desired goals are met, employees would expect tolerance from their employer regarding sickness and mistakes in the future, better working conditions, fair rewards and opportunities for advancement Stefanidis & Strogilos (2020). Such support from the employer organisation would lead to positive work-related outcomes such as increased organisational commitment (Arasanmi & Krishna 2019), job satisfaction (Nijhawan et al. 2022) and reduced TI and absenteeism (Park et al. 2021). Employees who believe their employer organisation is supportive will more likely be willing to achieve their personal and organisational goals, effectively balancing the psychological resources. Alternatively, unsupportive employers foster a win-lose approach (Akhtar et al. 2018). Unsupportive employers may create a work environment in which employees' individual goals are incompatible with other employees or even with the employer's goals (Giao et al. 2020). This incompatibility may lead some employees towards goal attainment and others less likely to achieve their goals (Gurbuz, Turunc & Celik 2013). It is likely that an employer organisation that is supportive or non-supportive can influence whether there will be positive outcomes to reduce TI and EE (Caesens et al. 2017; Chatzittofis et al. 2021; Marchand & Vandenberghe 2016).

Emotional exhaustion and turnover intention

The COR theory is one of the most unified theories to explain the link between EE and TI (Saleh et al. 2023; Wright & Cropanzano 1998). According to this theory, individuals work actively to maintain, protect and build things that they consider to be centrally valued (Hbfol 2011). The theory suggests that because individuals have the motivation to protect their resources when resources continue to decrease, those individuals will withdraw to protect their resources (Zhang et al. 2013). They suffer stress when adverse conditions develop (Knudsen, Ducharme & Roman 2006; Park et al. 2021). Drawing on this theory, we propose that TI is more likely to arise when employees feel that their emotional resources are emotionally overextended or depleted owing to a lack of fairness, good working conditions, adequate pay and opportunities for advancement (Arshadi & Shahbazi 2013; Nguyen et al. 2022). For example, a previous study by Cao and Qu (2014) found that EE related positively to TI. They imply that employees who experience high emotional exhaustion, weakness in functioning and adverse health outcomes because of stressful work conditions are likely to perform poorly and demonstrate negative behaviour such as absenteeism and turnover. A study by Hills (2019) revealed that employees

who experience a prominent level of EE are likely to avoid or reduce resource losses by quitting their employer organisation. Wen et al. (2020) examined the effect of occupational stress on TI and found that an important level of occupational stress related to a high TI. A study by Knudsen et al. (2009) reported that EE related positively to TI. Overall, from a COR theory perspective, it can be explained that perceptions of work overload, lack of support, elevated levels of job demands and poor working conditions exacerbate the degree of employees' EE directly. Moreover, the theory indicates that EE can lead the employer organisation to notice negative work behaviour on behalf of its members, which may, in turn, result in the intention to quit the job. Thus, the researchers hypothesised that EE relates positively to TI (see H₁).

Perceived organisational support as a moderator

Perceived organisational support is an individual's belief that their employer organisation values their contribution and cares for their well-being, which can be seen as an essential job resource that can help to achieve job demand (Demerouti et al. 2001). Employees who have a positive belief in support from their employer for their career growth and who care about their career needs are likely to see the support that they receive as an essential resource to help them cope with stress while focussing more on work goals (Shabbir, Naz & Trivedi 2021). A positive feeling of perceived employer support relates to reduced EE and TI (Kurtessis et al. 2017). Also, employees with a high feeling of POS have a sense of work-related achievement (Sya & Mangundjaya 2020). A study by Yang (2018) emphasised the moderating effect of POS in the association between burnout and job satisfaction. Studies conducted on the relationship between POS and EE have established that with high POS, EE will decrease among employees (Ali et al. 2022), and they will contribute towards achieving the employer organisation's goals (Palmer et al. 2017). For example, employees with high POS have been found to have a prominent level of affective commitment (Kurtessis et al. 2017). Srivastava and Agrawal (2020) claim that POS is a positive feeling that employees share, and its foundation is based on employees' emotions. A study by Eisenberger et al. (2001) found that a joyous feeling of POS leads to a low level of EE and a high social exchange relationship, which in turn results in a positive work outcome for both employees and the employer organisation. There is also evidence that elevated levels of POS are likely to generate a feeling of employer support, increasing emotional resources and decreasing the intention to leave. It is, therefore, hypothesised that an important level of POS moderates the relationship between EE and TI (see H₂).

Hypotheses of the research

The following hypotheses were developed for the research:

H₁: EE relates positively and significantly with TI.

H₂: POS moderates the relationship between EE and TI.

Aim of the study

Employee turnover is quite costly for employer organisations and affects both the strategic goals and competitiveness, resulting in additional costs of hiring and training new employees (Scott, Waite & Reede 2021). Influencing factors of TI in southern African countries are still scarce owing to the lack of guidance for human resource partners and industrial psychologists to reduce EE and intention to leave through positive POS. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the extent to which employees' perceptions of their employer organisation's support moderate the relationship between their perceptions of EE and TI. Based on the study's hypothesised model (see Figure 1), the specific research question is as follows: *How do employees' POS influence their level of EE and TI?*

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design underpinned by a positivist framework. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to collect the data. The sample size was calculated from a total population of ($N = 20\,000$) permanent employees in the South African food sector. We used RaoSoft with a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error. A sample size of 377 is commonly suggested to achieve a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error when estimating a population proportion of 50% (Cochran 1977). The questionnaire was completed via Google Forms. The researcher sent a link to 600 employees of the company through the information technology department. In a survey with 385 responses, a response rate of 60% was achieved. The majority of the sample were females (33.8%; age range 35%–44%; mean year of work experience = 8; s.d. = 1.58) who were in favour of the study.

Measuring instrument

The respondents completed a biographical and demographic survey, using the following standardised instruments, namely the Emotional Exhaustion Scale (EES) (Maslach & Jackson 1986), the Turnover Intention Scale (TIS) (Halbesleben & Wheeler 2008) and the Perceived Organisational Support Scale (POSS) (Eisenberger et al. 1986). The measurement qualities of these instruments are described in the next paragraph.

The EES was used to measure an employee's emotions of being overwhelmed and exhausted by their work. The EES

consists of 5 items, which are rated on a seven-point Likert scale (0 = Never, Everyday = 7). Maslach and Jackson (1986) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81 for internal consistency for the EES, while the present study realised a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81 for the EES.

The TIS is a five-point measurement of participants' assessment of whether they want to stay or leave the company. It is rated on a six-point Likert scale (0 = never, very satisfactory or very unlikely; 5 = always, unsatisfactory or very likely). Examples of the measurement included: 'I intend to leave the company in the next 12 months'. Halbesleben and Wheeler (2008) provided a Cronbach's alpha of between 0.88 and 0.91 for the TIS scale. This study resulted in a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.66 for the TIS.

The POSS was used to measure the degree to which employees perceived support from their organisation. The six POSS items were used in a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'completely agree (5)' to 'completely disagree (1)'. Example items included: 'The organisation values my contribution to its well-being'; 'The organisation and my supervisor care about my well-being'; and 'The organisation and supervisor care about my general satisfaction at work'. In terms of the POSS, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85 for the scores from the overall POSS. This study obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.84 for the POSS.

Data analysis

The study's collected data were analysed using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 29.0). Firstly, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) determined the factorial structure. The CFA was calculated using Varimax, with a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling precision greater than 0.50, factor loadings of 0.6 or higher and an eigenvalue of 1. The researchers chose to examine only components with a loading of 0.50 or higher, as indicated by Hair, Howard and Nitzl (2020). Secondly, structural modelling of POS, EE and TI was performed and the following goodness of fit indices (GFIs) were considered for all the constructs: the Chi-square ($\text{CMIN}/df < 0.05$); the GFI; the adjusted goodness of Fit Index (AGFI); the normed Fit Index (NFI); the comparative Fit Index (CFI); the Tucker–Lewis Index ($\text{TLI} > 0.95$) and the root mean square errors of approximation ($\text{RMSEA} < 0.05$). Thirdly, the descriptive statistics were calculated to determine the mean and standard deviations, and correlation analysis was calculated to establish the relationship between the variables. In the fourth stage, hierarchical moderator regression analysis was computed to verify if POS moderates the relationship between EE and TI. Before performing the moderator regressions, a collinearity diagnostic was performed to check whether the zero-order correlations were below the threshold of 0.80, that the variance inflation factors did not exceed 10, and that the tolerance values were close to 1 (Hair et al. 2020). The researchers conducted a simple propensity test to examine the interactions by varying the value of the moderator at different standard deviations from the mean

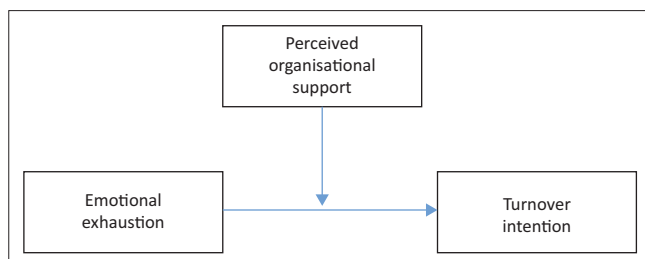


FIGURE 1: Hypothesised model proposing the interaction effect of organisational support.

(Hair et al. 2020). The critical value was set at a 95% confidence interval ($p < 0.05$) to reduce the likelihood of Type I errors. In this article, the practical significance of the R^2 values was assessed by calculating effect sizes (f^2).

Ethical considerations

An application for full ethical approval was made to the University of Johannesburg's Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management (IPPM) Research Ethics Committee and ethics consent was received on 03 June 2021. The ethics approval number is IPPM-2021-495(M).

Participants agreed to participate digitally in the survey after being informed in writing about the aim of the study and its voluntary nature. The researcher guaranteed the participants that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. Participants received a Google Forms link from Alphabet, Inc., based in Mountain View, California, United States of America. They were instructed to complete the survey during their working hours.

Results

This section presents the results of the confirmatory factor analysis, descriptive statistics, correlational analysis and hierarchical regression models, which examined the relationships between POS, EE and TI.

Confirmatory factor analysis

To assess the factorial structure and reliability of the study's variables, principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was employed. As shown in Table 1, the KMO index scores were 2.847 for EE, 2.305 for TI and 3.331 for POS. According to Table 1, the eigenvalues for all constructs in the study were > 1 , and all factor loadings were above 50. Table 1 shows that all indices of the goodness of fit statistics were within the threshold: $CMIN/df < 0.05$; GFI, AGFI, NFI, CFI, TLI > 0.95 ; and RMSEA < 0.05 for POS, EE and TI.

Table 2 illustrates that, except for POS, the composite reliability of EE and TI was above 0.70. Table 2 indicates that in addition to TI, the average extracted variance for EE and POS was above 0.50. Also, Table 2 shows that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were between 0.66 and 0.84.

Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics for the variables included in the study are presented in Table 3. The mean values ranged

between ($M = 2.50$ to $M = 3.15$). Notably, POS exhibited the highest mean value ($M = 3.15$, s.d. = 0.87), followed by TI ($M = 3.00$, s.d. = 0.92), while EE displayed the lowest mean value ($M = 2.50$, s.d. = 0.86).

Correlation analysis

Analysis of the interrelationships between POS, EE and TI revealed significant correlations. The results show that POS related negatively to EE ($r = -0.50$; large effect size, $p \leq 0.05$, and TI ($r = -0.30$; medium effect size, $p \leq 0.05$). The results reveal that EE related positively with TI ($r = -0.46$; medium effect size; $p \leq 0.05$). These findings provide empirical support for the hypothesised relationships between these variables and the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study.

Effects on turnover intention

As shown in Table 4, EE did not act as a predictor of TI for the main effects ($F [3; 381] = 31.12$; $p \geq 0.05$), ($B = -0.31$; SEB = 0.28; 95% CI = $[-0.86; 0.24]$; $p = 0.27$). This means that EE was not associated with a decrease in the TI percentage. In addition, POS acted as a predictor of TI, as ($F [3; 381] = 31.12$; $p \geq 0.05$), ($B = -0.93$; SEB = 0.23; 95% CI = $[-1.38; -0.49]$; $p = 0.00$). This suggests that POS was associated with a decrease in the TI percentage. The above results were found after analysing an interaction by using the moderator values at the mean and standard deviations above and below the mean (Hair et al. 2020). Table 4 illustrates that POS acts as a moderator in the relationship between EE and TI, as ($F [3; 381] = 31.12$;

TABLE 2: Loadings, composite reliability and average variance extracted: Organisation support, emotional exhaustion and turnover intention ($N = 385$).

Variables	Items	Components			CR	AVE	α
		1	2	3			
Emotional exhaustion	EE1	0.808	-	-	0.87	0.57	0.81
	EE2	0.801	-	-	-	-	-
	EE3	0.793	-	-	-	-	-
	EE4	0.746	-	-	-	-	-
	EE5	0.605	-	-	-	-	-
Turnover intention	TI1	-	0.768	-	0.79	0.43	0.66
	TI2	-	0.727	-	-	-	-
	TI4	-	0.604	-	-	-	-
	TI5	-	0.591	-	-	-	-
	TI6	-	0.572	-	-	-	-
Organisational support	OS6	-	-	0.784	0.555	0.88	0.84
	OS4	-	-	0.784	-	-	-
	OS2	-	-	0.756	-	-	-
	OS12	-	-	0.722	-	-	-
	OS9	-	-	0.716	-	-	-
	OS11	-	-	0.704	-	-	-
KMO measure of sampling adequacy	-	0.829	0.846	0.691	-	-	-
Bartlett's test of sphericity	-	589.170	821.32	286.740	-	-	-
df	-	10.000	15.000	10.000	-	-	-
Sig.	-	0.000	0.000	0.000	-	-	-
Eigenvalues	-	2.847	2.305	3.331	-	-	-
% of variance	-	56.93	0.86	38.42	-	-	-

CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted; EE, emotional exhaustion; TI, turnover intention; OS, organisational support; KMO, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin; Sig., significance; df , differentiation.

TABLE 1: Structural equation modelling.

Model	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
POS	0.99	0.95	0.99	0.99	0.97	0.04	0.02
EE	0.99	0.96	0.98	0.99	0.98	0.03	0.02
TI	0.99	0.98	0.98	0.99	0.99	0.03	0.01

POS, perceived organisational support; EE, emotional exhaustion; TI, turnover intention; GFI, goodness of Fit Index; AGFI, adjusted goodness of Fit Index; NFI, normed Fit Index; CFI, comparative Fit Index; TLI, Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA, root mean square errors of approximation; SRMR, standardised root mean.

TABLE 3: Descriptive statistics, mean, standard deviation and correlations ($N = 385$).

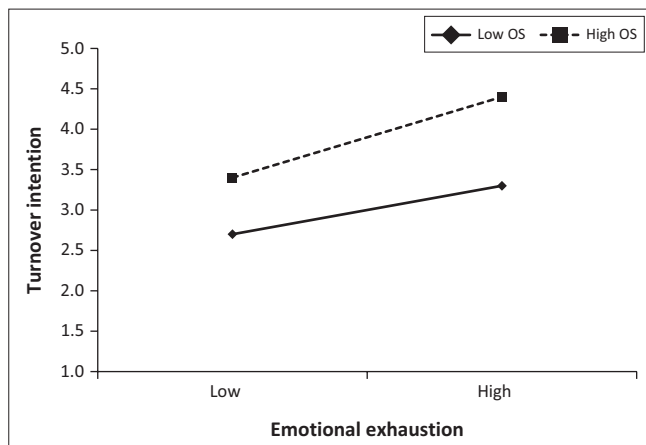
Variables	<i>M</i>	s.d.	Components		
			1	2	3
Organisational support	3.15	0.87	1	-0.50+++	-0.30++
Emotional exhaustion	2.50	0.86	-	1.00	0.46++
Turnover intention	3.00	0.92	-	-	1.00

Note: ++, $r \geq 0.30 \geq r \leq 0.49$ (medium effect); +++, $r \geq 0.50$ (large effect).

TABLE 4: Moderating effect of organisational support on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention ($N = 385$).

Variables	<i>B</i>	SE _{<i>B</i>}	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	95% confidence interval		<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²
					LLCI	ULCI		
Turnover intentions	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Constant	5.04	0.74	6.78	0.00	3.58	6.51	0.44	0.20
Emotional exhaustion	-0.31	0.28	-1.10	0.27	-0.86	0.24	-	-
Organisational support	-0.93	0.23	-4.14	0.00	-1.38	-0.49	-	-
Interaction	-0.22	0.09	-2.54	0.01	-0.05	-0.38	-	-
Emotional exhaustion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organisational support	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

B, unstandardised coefficient; SE, standard error; LLCI, lower level of confidence interval; ULCI, upper level of confidence interval.



OS, organisational support.

FIGURE 2: Interaction effect between organisational support, emotional exhaustion and turnover intention.

$p \leq 0.05$), $B = -0.22$; SEB = 0.09; 95% CI = [-0.05; -0.38]; $p \leq 0.05$). The data were depicted earlier in Figure 1.

Discussion

This study investigated whether POS moderates the relationship between EE and TI (Figure 2). The results showed a significant positive relationship between EE and TI. In addition, employees' perceptions of POS related negatively to EE and TI. In addition, POS moderated the relationship between EE and TI. When employees scored high on EE, their self-reported TI was also high. When employees scored high on POS, their self-reported EE and TI were low. This means that employees who perceive that their organisation values their contributions are likely to be less exhausted and less inclined to leave the organisation. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies by Cao et al. (2016), who found that OS is negatively associated with EE and TI. These results can be explained by the fact that employees who perceive that their contributions are valued by the

employer and that the employer cares about their well-being are less challenged, conserve their emotional resources and display prominent levels of competence (Nguyen et al. 2022), leading to low turnover (Shah et al. 2022).

Employees who feel overwhelmed and exhausted or who experience elevated levels of EE are likely to be stressed at work and perform poorly. The results suggest that when employees perceive that the employee organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being, then it influences EE and TI. This implies that positive perceptions of employer support, including recognition, appreciation of their contributions and the employer's concern for their well-being, may result in employees experiencing lower stress levels and a reduced likelihood of leaving the organisation. These findings mirror the results of Chatzittofis et al. (2021), who found that employees who perceive positive employer support experience less stress or burnout and, therefore, prolong their membership at the employer organisation.

The results indicate that EE does not influence the intention to leave. This means that employees who have a strong bond with the company and their colleagues and feel supported by their employer do not resign, even if they are emotionally exhausted. These findings are consistent with the studies of Giao et al. (2020), which found that while EE is generally associated with higher TI, this association can be reduced if employees perceive their organisation as supportive and caring and value their work.

Implications for human resource practices

The study's findings have clearly established the role that OS can play as a significant variable in lessening EE and eventually reducing TI among food sector employees in South Africa. This is a clear call for human resource managers to make effective use of the given study findings by designing specific interventions that will improve POS such as introducing recognition programmes, developing a supportive work environment and promoting initiatives for work-life balance. Moreover, organisations can work at reducing the root causes of EE by establishing better workload management and role clarity and by providing sufficient resources for employees. If there is a focus on employee well-being and organisational culture, this will go a long way towards improving the retention of staff and the organisation's overall performance.

Limitations and future research directions

This study is not without its limitations. The use of a convenience sample places limitations on generalisation to the broader population. Future studies may target more representative sampling to enhance external validity. Besides, cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. Longitudinal research designs will provide more insight into the temporal dynamics of the effects of EE, OS and TI. In addition, further examination of influences by other variables like job demands, job resources and individual differences may add more value to TI in the food sector.

Conclusion

This study emphasises how EE, POS and TI are interwoven in the South African food sector. The results show that EE acts as a trigger in TI and further resonates with the effect of prolonged stress and emotional strain on employee retention. Crucially, the research identifies a significant role for POS to act as a buffer for EE and as a deterrent to TI. Employees who feel valued and supported at work, especially when their well-being is prioritised, are less likely to experience EE and, as a result, less likely to leave their jobs. Therefore, this underlines the strategic importance of developing a supportive organisational culture in which the employees feel valued, recognised and developed. Such POS efforts will not only help to reduce EE but will also instil a more engaged and committed workforce while reducing cases of turnover for improved overall organisational performance within the dynamic and demanding food industry.

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Data availability

The authors declare that all data that support this research article and findings are available in this article and its references.

Disclaimer

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