







# “Determinants of turnover intention: The case of public servants in Vietnam”

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# DETERMINANTS OF TURNOVER INTENTION: THE CASE OF PUBLIC SERVANTS IN VIETNAM

## Abstract

Turnover intention is an essential issue for every organization as retaining experienced and knowledgeable employees is an essential factor contributing to an organization's competitive advantage and sustainable growth. Governmental and non-profit organizations, in particular, need to develop measures for reducing the increasing rate of turnover among federal officials. This study examines the factors influencing intentions to leave among civil servants in the public administration sector. Therefore, an online survey was undertaken to collect data from the targeted respondents, who are employees and managers working in governmental organizations in Vietnam. By using the convenience sampling method, a total of 300 responses were obtained. Men made up 53.3% of the participants, while women made up the remainder. Nearly 60% of the participants work for governmental and political organizations, and the rest work for state unions. The collected data were then processed via AMOS software and analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling approach. The results indicate that job satisfaction strongly affects employees' turnover intentions, with a path coefficient of 0.352 and a p-value less than 0.001. In addition, perceived organizational support has a significant positive relationship with organizational commitment, evidenced by the path coefficient of 0.315 and p-value less than 0.001. Overall, the results suggest that organizations are more likely to retain qualified and committed employees when they attempt to develop appropriate training programs and an incentive reward system.

## Keywords

organizational commitment, job satisfaction,  
organizational support, public sector, HR strategies

## JEL Classification

J24, J53, J58

## INTRODUCTION

The significance of human-based strategy is even more emphasized in the current competitive market, especially in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Retaining talented employees is one of the major business strategies for long-term growth, as it enables firms to create and maintain competitive advantages (Chan & Ao, 2019). In addition, governmental and non-profit organizations also need professional labor forces to function efficiently (Pitts et al., 2011).

However, given the importance of high-quality human resources, Vietnamese public servants' turnover has been a consistent concern recently. The fact that talented and experienced civil servants are leaving organizations is becoming more noticeable as Vietnam has been experiencing an increasing employee turnover intention. From the start of 2017 to the present, many civil servants in Vietnam submitted resignation applications for reasons such as excessive procedures and regulations in the workplace preventing officials from being creative and deploying innovative ideas. It is observed that most public servants quit their jobs at government organizations to work at private companies. Compared to governmental organizations, private companies offer better salaries, various training and development programs, and working environments that are more professional and involve less

conflict among colleagues (Whitford & Lee, 2015). The departure of officials has caused a serious “brain drain,” which significantly influences the productivity and efficiency of the local commune government apparatus.

Job turnover in the public administration sector has become such a pressing issue, in part, because of the severe consequences that it creates for managers (Pitts et al., 2011). According to previous studies, employees who possess high turnover intention tend to perform poorly at work until they decide to leave the organization, which may damage the productivity and efficiency of the firm (Kim & Chang, 2014). In addition to creating turmoil and causing disruptions in service delivery, turnover imposes considerable costs such as severance pay and replacement costs, including hiring, screening, and training new employees. Even though employee mobility is inevitable in the labor market, losing numerous public civil servants can cause severe consequences in reduced performance and a shortage of skilled laborers in the public sector. It can significantly influence the quality of service delivery to the public (Zhang et al., 2017).

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

The dynamic and constantly changing environment in modern business requires organizations to pay intensive attention to human resources management, as the labor force plays a crucial role in their overall sustainable growth. When an employee chooses to quit, the organization may have to bear various costs, including direct costs (advertising, recruitment, and training) and indirect costs (lost work hours, cost of overtime, and errors made by newcomers) (Pitts et al., 2011). Moreover, the loss of experienced employees can adversely affect the morale of those who remain with the organization, further reducing their productivity and downgrading the organization's competitive advantage (Pitts et al., 2011). Therefore, public organizations must determine the potential negative drivers of turnover intention to retain a high-quality workforce. Accordingly, much research has been conducted to explain this phenomenon. Employee turnover occurs when an employee voluntarily leaves an organization (Rhoades et al., 2001). Various factors can influence this decision. For instance, employees' incentives to go and look for alternative organizations may arise from negative working experiences or a more satisfying benefit system elsewhere (T. Hussain, 2012). In addition, employees' perception of organizational factors such as job satisfaction, professional identity, and organizational commitment is related to the intention to quit (Bright, 2021; Rahman, 2020). Hence, this study adds to the existing literature by examining the individual and behavioral factors

affecting employees' intentions to leave, primarily focusing on perceived organizational support (POS), personality traits, job satisfaction, and organizational and professional commitment among civil servants in Vietnam.

Perceived organizational support is defined as employees' beliefs about the extent to which their organization values their contributions and shows great concern for their wellbeing (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). It is widely confirmed that a positive emotional relationship between an organization and its employees is essential to decreasing labor turnover (Loi et al., 2006; Wayne et al., 2002). Since employees have often reacted positively to organizational support, POS is expected to create a strong desire to commit to and stay with the organization (T. Hussain, 2012). Therefore, organizational commitment is one of the crucial outcomes of POS. According to the attitudinal and behavioral approaches, organizational commitment is defined as an individual's mindset with respect to the mutual goals and values that they share with their organization, as well as how they behave in the context of their employment conditions and relationship with the organization (de la Torre-Ruiz et al., 2019). In other definitions, organizational commitment is an individual's attitude toward an organization (Williams & Hazer, 1986). This attitude serves as a psychological connection in the interaction between an employee and the organization. It influences how an individual identifies with the business's goals and values and is dedicated to its mission and vision.

The existing literature has developed two theories explaining the correlation between POS, organizational commitment, and turnover intention: social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and organizational support theory (Orpen, 1994). Social exchange theory is based on the norm of reciprocity, wherein both employees and employers feel that they are receiving something of value from their relationship (Dawley et al., 2010). Specifically, if employees perceive that the organization can provide socio-emotional support and value their contributions, they are compelled to exchange dedication and loyalty in return (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Similarly, organizational support theory states that employees tend to develop a stronger bond with and trust their organizations if they are aware that their efforts and contributions are rewarded. Organizational support will be readily provided in challenging times (T. Hussain, 2012; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

According to Loi et al. (2006), employees with high POS are obligated to exhibit positive attitudes and behaviors such as commitment and devoted contribution to their organizations as they feel indebted to the support provided by the organization. Aubé et al. (2007), using data collected from 249 employees in Canada, confirmed that POS had a significant positive relationship with organizational commitment. On the other hand, using data collected from 230 employees in the telecommunications sector in Pakistan, T. Hussain (2012) found that POS had a significant negative correlation with turnover intention. The same was found by Arshadi (2011), who examined 325 employees in the Iranian industrial organizations. In general, the majority of previous studies have found that POS has a significant and negative inverse impact on turnover intention. In other words, employees who have high POS tend to be reluctant to look for alternative employment from other organizations (Dawley et al., 2010).

Prior studies have shown that employees with solid commitment are more willing to form a long-term employment relationship and contribute a significant effort to their organization's development (Porter et al., 1974; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). However, a more recent branch of research claims otherwise. Mowday (1998) states that, as the nature of organizational employment has

changed dramatically over time, employees' commitment is no longer an important factor. It has become less relevant to behavior management research. The authors who share the same point of view are also skeptical because most organizations nowadays do not value their human capital as they claim. Specifically, there is a trend among many firms and corporations to lay off employees to decrease costs and increase competitive advantage (Emshoff, 1994). Therefore, employees' commitment is expected to decrease, making the relationship between organizational commitment (OC) and turnover intention less significant. Rahman (2020) exploits data from 355 employees in Bangladesh and provides evidence of an insignificant relationship between OC and TI.

While organizational commitment refers to the permanent behavior and attitude towards their jobs that employees develop during the time spent with their organization (Çelik & Oral, 2021), employees' job satisfaction (JS) refers to the positive feelings that employees develop toward their work and the rewards that they receive from the organization (Ahmad et al., 2014). In other words, the more positive job-related emotions an employee has, the greater their JS becomes. Yamak et al. (2019) found that employees' satisfaction with their job is determined by promotion opportunities, salary, and other financial benefits. Critical reviews have been popular on the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The causal priority between the two constructs, however, remains controversial. Most research has found that satisfaction is essential in creating employees' commitment (Park & Doo, 2020). In contrast, another stream of studies supports the inverse causal role of OC to JS (Park, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the roles of JS and OC in order to interpret their relationship more precisely and thoroughly.

Job satisfaction is essential in reducing employees' intentions to leave the organization (Imran et al., 2014; Kim & Chang, 2014). A high level of job satisfaction minimizes the probability of voluntary exit, while increased dissatisfaction among employees results in a higher possibility of considering other job opportunities. The research on employees' satisfaction and turnover intention has been widely studied by many scholars, the majority of

which provide a consistent negative relationship between the aforementioned factors. For instance, Imran et al. (2014), using results from a survey of 758 employees working in the Pakistani banking sector, showed that satisfied employees are more likely to stay at the organization. Similarly, Rahman (2020) also concluded that JS had a negative effect on turnover intentions (TI). On the other hand, Khatri et al. (2001) and Samad (2006) found a modest relationship between JS and TI.

Personality is generally defined as the unique features of an individual's mindset and the distinctive aspects that make one person different from another. According to Templer (2012), personality is defined as consistent patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior that determine self-evaluation and interaction. It also affects how individuals experience work events and work conditions and emotionally and behaviorally react to them (Templer, 2012). Although it is a popular topic among researchers, findings regarding the relationship between personality and JS are mixed. Furnham and Zacherl (1986) confirmed an insignificant correlation between the two variables. Furnham et al. (2002) arrived at the same conclusion that personality was not a strong predictor of JS.

Similarly, Dole and Schroeder (2001) also failed to find a significant relationship between personality and JS among professional accountants. However, in another study using data collected from 523 employees in Singapore with 360 returned questionnaires, Templer (2012) found that all five dimensions of personality had a significant relationship with JS. On the other hand, Zhai et al. (2013), who used data from 818 employees in five cities in China, showed that only extraversion had a significant positive effect on JS.

Professional commitment (PC) is defined as an individual's attachment to and identification with their career (Çelik & Oral, 2021). PC has distinguishable features from other types of commitment, such as OC and job involvement (Blau, 1964). According to Chang (1999), PC can significantly influence individuals' behavior. Specifically, employees who are highly committed to their profession tend to fulfill assigned tasks voluntarily and devotedly (Hall & Mansfield, 1971). Porter et al. (1974) explained that such individuals acknowledge the values and objec-

tives of their career and a strong desire to maintain membership in their profession. In a study investigating the effects of the five dimensions of personality on PC among 363 Indian managers from the public and private sectors, Arora and Rangnekar (2016) found evidence for significant positive relationships between the said variables. Regardless, there is still limited research investigating the relationship between employee personality and PC in a public sector context.

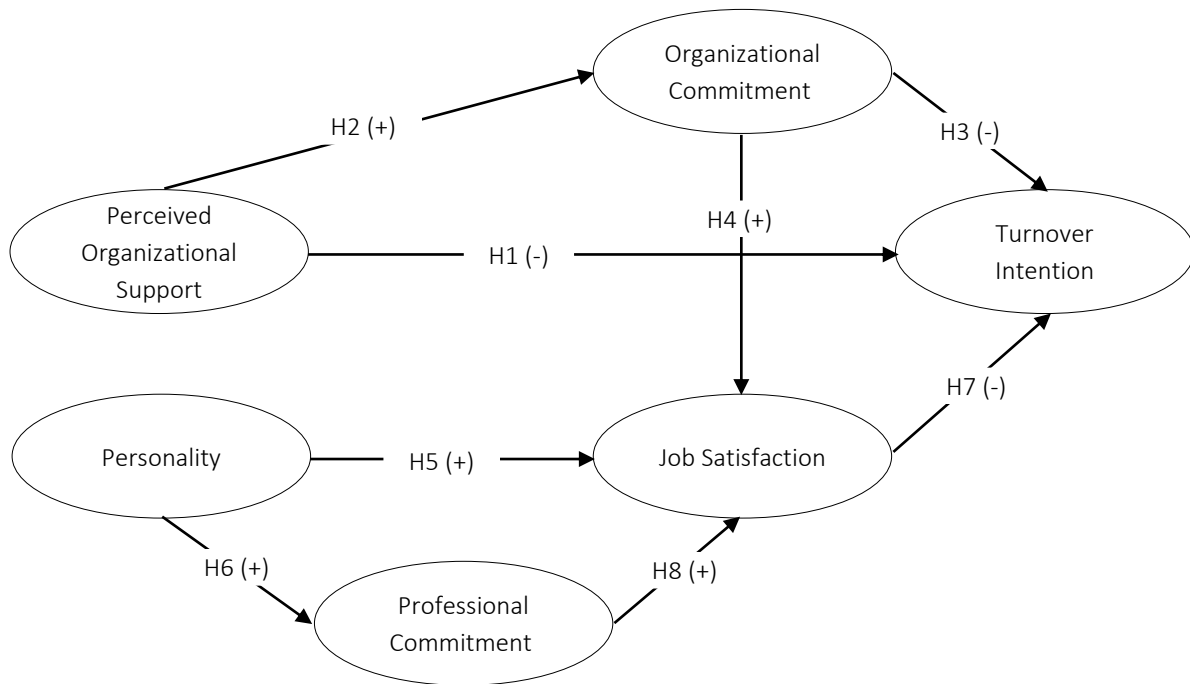
Considerable research has been done to confirm the close relationship between PC and JS. It has been demonstrated in several studies that professional dedication is a powerful predictor of organizational outcomes such as turnover intention and job satisfaction (Blau, 1964; Çelik & Oral, 2021). More specifically, Adio and Popoola (2010) found that JS was closely related to PC among librarians in Nigeria. A similar result was also found by Çelik and Oral (2021); however, the magnitude of the association was only of modest significance. This study is based on the assumption that when individuals demonstrate a high level of dedication to their profession, they are more likely to enjoy performing everyday tasks, which improves job satisfaction.

In order to address the aforementioned problems arising from employees' turnover intention, the main objectives are to (1) identify factors that influence public officials' decisions to quit their jobs and (2) make recommendations for developing effective strategies to assist Vietnamese leaders of governmental and political organizations in retaining experienced and highly qualified civil servants.

In accordance with the reviewed literature, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1: *POS has a negative relationship with turnover intention.*
- H2: *POS has a positive relationship with organizational commitment.*
- H3: *Organizational commitment has a negative relationship with turnover intention.*
- H4: *Organizational commitment has a positive influence on job satisfaction.*





**Figure 1.** Research model

- H5: Personality has a significant relationship with job satisfaction.*
- H6: Personality has a positive relationship with professional commitment.*
- H7: Job satisfaction has a negative relationship with turnover intention.*
- H8: Professional commitment has a positive relationship with job satisfaction.*

The theoretical framework of the current study was adopted and extended from Çelik and Oral (2021). The model developed by Çelik and Oral (2021) emphasizes the importance of an employee's personality on job satisfaction, professional commitment, and organizational commitment, which have been proven to have a substantial impact on the intention of employees to remain on the job. The current study extends the model mentioned above by considering POS and testing the interrelationships among proposed variables. This model focuses on examining turnover intention arising from employees' personalities and perceptions related to the organization's existing benefit systems. Figure 1 depicts the research model for this study, which incorporates the eight hypotheses.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Data collection

The current paper used quantitative methods to examine the relationship among POS, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction and investigate their impact on public servants' turnover intention. The data used for analysis is primary data collected from respondents working at public organizations in Vietnam. The questionnaires were exploited to collect data from a broad population in a highly economical way. In addition, data collection can be used to indicate potential explanations for a specific relationship between variables. Moreover, the data collection has not required any ethics approval as no study relating to individual information and informed consent was conducted.

The targeted respondents in this study include employees from all management levels working at governmental offices in Vietnam. A questionnaire containing measurement scales adopted from previous studies was designed to investigate the relationship among the latent variables stated in the research model. Four leaders working in the public sector were invited to participate in an interview, including chairperson of the Town

People's Committee, chief of the District Party Committee's Office, Deputy Director of General Hospital, and director of the District Traffic Team, to verify the meaning and relevance of each inquiry to the public sector organization. By using the convenience sampling method, 500 questionnaires were distributed to both employees and managers, including supervisors and directors in all departments. After screening, 300 valid samples (60% in responding rate) were obtained.

Table 1 depicts the demographic characteristics collected from 300 participants in the survey, of whom 59.7% belonged to governmental and political organizations, and the remaining 40.3% were from state unions. It is worth noticing that undergraduate employees took the most significant proportion of 77.3% among the public servants working in governmental organizations. Another striking feature is that employees under 35 years old accounted for 73.7%, indicating a very young labor force, which is surprising given the examined context of the public administration sector. This can partly explain the increasing rate of labor turnover of public servants. Since young employees may have a lower ability to cope with stress and pressure in this sector, they tend to search for opportunities in other organizations or companies that have a more flexible business environment.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics

Characteristics (N = 300)		Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	53.3
	Female	46.7
Education	High school	14.3
	Undergraduate	77.4
	Graduate	8.3
Age	Under 35	73.7
	Over 35	26.3
Workplace	Governmental organizations and political organizations	59.7
	State unions	40.3

## 2.2. Measurement

The survey included 30 items, measuring six latent variables: organizational commitment, job satisfaction, job performance, professional commitment, personality, and POS. All measures used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Firstly, OC was assessed using five items developed by Meyer and Allen (1991). Secondly, five items were adopted from Weiss et al. (1967) and modified to measure public servants' JS. Thirdly, TI was assessed using four items adapted from Bozeman and Perrewé (2001). This variable described the level to which civil servants desire to leave their organization. To measure PC, the three items from Blau et al. (1993) were used. Fourthly, to measure the personality (P) of the employees working in the public administration sector, the five-factor personality traits scale was adopted from John et al. (1991). Finally, POS was measured by five items adopted from the eight-item scale of the short form of the survey (Eisenberger et al., 2002).

## 3. RESULTS

The data analysis is conducted via two-step Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Talukder et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2016) by AMOS 25.0 software. First, the measurement items were examined by confirmatory factor analysis before testing the structural model.

### 3.1. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

The measurement scales were examined to demonstrate reliability and discriminant validity. Following previous studies, the acceptable threshold values for Cronbach's alpha, AVE, and CR are 0.6, 0.5, and 0.7, respectively (Bagozzi et al., 1991). After calculating, all Cronbach's alpha values were above 0.70, which is generally considered acceptable in related literature (Schriesheim & Eisenbach, 1995; Shelby, 2011). Additionally, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to assess the variance among measurements of the research model. The EFA results showed that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.842, above 0.05, indicating that EFA is appropriate for factor analysis in this study.

Table 2 shows the results for the reliability and validity of the constructs. All the AVE values obtained exceeded the suggested 0.5 value, thus ensuring convergent validity. Moreover, the composite reliability indicators of all the tested variables were above the recommended value of 0.7 (ranging from 0.788 to 0.865), confirming high internal consistency. Overall, all estimates for the correlations are below 0.85,

**Table 2.** Constructs reliability and validity

Constructs	$\alpha$	CR	AVE	MSV	POS	OC	P	TI	JS	PC
POS	0.863	0.865	0.562	0.191	0.749					
OC	0.828	0.84	0.514	0.197	0.322	0.717				
P	0.828	0.835	0.56	0.145	0.211	0.327	0.748			
TI	0.821	0.823	0.541	0.24	-0.357	-0.327	-0.121	0.735		
JS	0.813	0.803	0.505	0.274	0.307	0.391	0.381	-0.399	0.71	
PC	0.780	0.788	0.557	0.274	0.437	0.443	0.302	-0.490	0.523	0.747

Note: Standard Deviation (SD), Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Maximum Shared Variance (MSV).

meaning that there is high discriminant validity between this model's concepts (Kline, 1998). Therefore, the scale used in this research has adequate internal consistency and reliability.

Following previous literature, a range of fit indices to assess the research model was adopted, which included the following: chi-squared, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) (Çelik & Oral, 2021; Dawley et al., 2010; de la Torre-Ruiz et al., 2019). The chi-squared/df ratio (2.053) falls within the recommended range of 1 to 2. The TLI and CFI values are 0.9 and 0.911, respectively, indicating a good fit. The value for GFI is 0.88, still in the acceptable range. Finally, the RMSEA value exceeds 0.05, which is also appropriate. Overall, the results indicate a good fit for the proposed model's data.

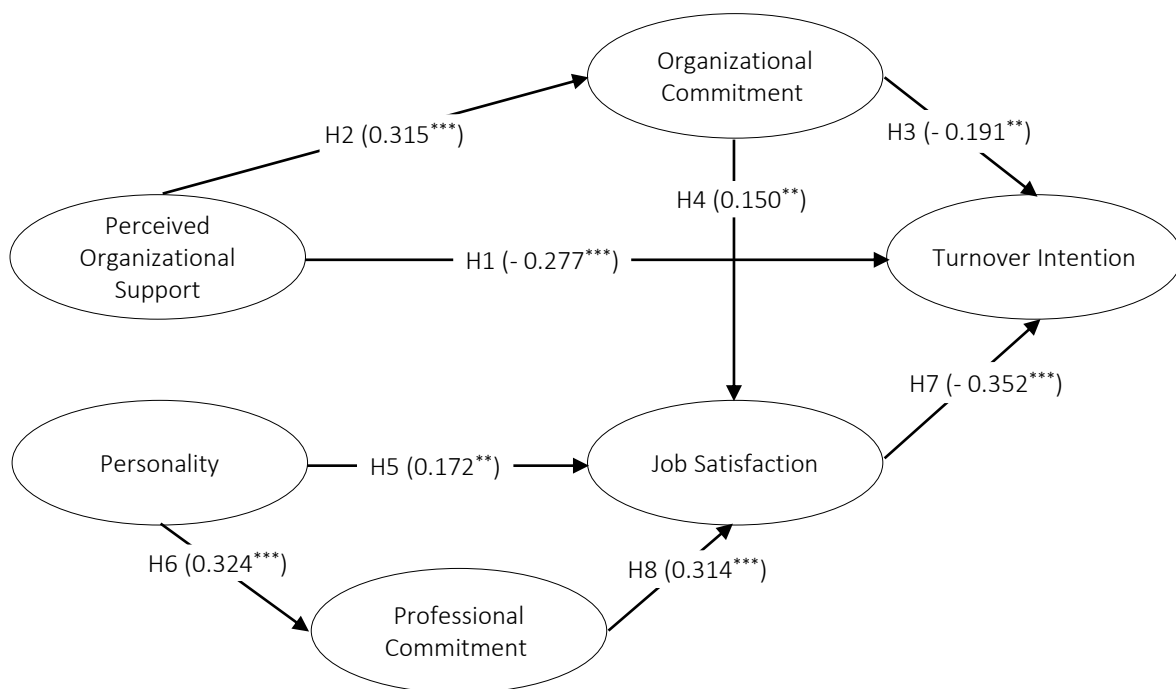
### 3.2. SEM analysis

The relationship among the variables is illustrated in the SEM analysis results, which are shown in Figure 2. All *p*-values are less than 0.05, except for H3, H4, and H5, whose *p*-values are less than 0.1, which can still be acceptable. Thus, all eight hypotheses are supported.

**Table 3.** SEM results

Hypotheses	Path coefficients	P-value	Results
H1: POS $\rightarrow$ TI	-0.277	***	Accepted
H2: POS $\rightarrow$ OC	0.315	***	Accepted
H3: OC $\rightarrow$ TI	-0.191	.027	Accepted
H4: OC $\rightarrow$ JS	0.150	.008	Accepted
H5: P $\rightarrow$ JS	0.172	.002	Accepted
H6: P $\rightarrow$ PC	0.324	***	Accepted
H7: JS $\rightarrow$ TI	-0.352	***	Accepted
H8: PC $\rightarrow$ JS	0.314	***	Accepted

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

**Figure 2.** SEM results



## 4. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate a strong relationship and impact among the tested variables in the research model. According to the results shown in Figure 2, perceived organizational support and employees' intention to leave were found to have a significant direct relationship, implying that perceived organizational support has an inverse influence on turnover intention. In other words, the greater the extent to which employees feel that their organization is highly concerned with their wellbeing and personal development, the less likely they will leave the organization. This finding is consistent with Arshadi (2011) and Kalidass and Bahron (2015), who proved that perceived organizational support significantly reduces employees' turnover intention. The results also show a significant correlation between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment. This confirms the social exchange theory, which states that if employees perceive that their personal values and wellbeing are supported by their organization, they will return the favor by being more committed and loyal to their organization. This finding is also consistent with Akgunduz and Sanli (2017), de la Torre-Ruiz et al. (2019), and Loi et al. (2006).

As can be interpreted from the results, organizational commitment impacted turnover intention. This finding is consistent with Arshadi (2011) and Joo et al. (2015), who confirmed that organizational commitment is an important indicator of turnover intention. The result can be explained by the distinct characteristics of Vietnamese public servants. Specifically, most civil employees have a great sense of pride in their job and organizations; thus, they are more likely to remain loyal and committed to their organizations. This finding, however,

contradicts Rahman (2020)'s assertion that organizational commitment has little influence in determining employees' decision to leave. The results also support the significant relationship between organizational commitment and job satisfaction, which is in line with Park (2020). This implies that when civil servant feels a sense of belonging and find the career path in their organization meaningful, they are more likely to be satisfied with their current employment. It was found that job satisfaction directly correlates with turnover intention. This means that if an employee's level of job satisfaction is low, there is a high chance that the employee may leave the company. This finding aligns with Joo et al. (2015), who confirmed a similar result.

Personality was also found to be positively correlated with job satisfaction, which is consistent with previous research confirming a strong impact of an individual's unique psychology factors on their level of job satisfaction (Furnham & Zacherl, 1986; Templer, 2012). Additionally, personality has a strong direct impact on the professional commitment of public servants in Vietnam. This may imply that individual psychological factors and traits can greatly influence attitudes toward career commitment. Results of Çelik and Oral (2021) and Nesje (2016) also support this finding. Professional commitment was also found to have a significant influence on job satisfaction. This can be explained by the fact that individuals with a high commitment to their career tend to consider working and contributing to the organization to achieve their personal goals while doing the job they love. Therefore, there is a high chance that they will experience greater satisfaction from work (Çelik & Oral, 2021).

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## CONCLUSION

This study aims to determine the factors that influence turnover intention of public servants in Vietnam. The results confirm that organizational commitment, POS, and job satisfaction significantly impact turnover intention. Employees who are content and devoted to their organizations are less likely to leave. The greater the extent employees perceive that their organization gives them support, the more they feel a moral obligation to keep working for that organization. Notably, job satisfaction has the strongest impact on turnover intention, further emphasizing the importance of public servants' satisfaction in developing organizational policy to retain a highly qualified workforce.

The findings provide valuable and practical insights for improving managerial efficiency, especially in human capital management practices in the public sector. Organizations are recommended to provide supportive and empowering activities such as training and career development programs and an incentive reward system for employees. These practices enable organizations to recognize employees' contributions and show concern for employees' wellbeing. Additionally, building a comprehensive job design and an open, innovative, and encouraging workplace are highly recommended to enhance employees' satisfaction and commitment.

The limitation of this study is that it only looked at the direct influence of the hypothesized connections; hence, it is advised that future studies look into the mediator effects of exogenous variables on a turnover intention for a more significant in-depth analysis. In addition, the link between employees' turnover intentions and actual turnover has not yet been investigated because of the limited availability of data. As a result, future research may build on these findings to give more complete insights and implications about the repercussions of turnover intentions.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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Funding acquisition: Phuong Nguyen, Tien Huynh, Hoa Tran.

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Visualization: Nga Le, Tien Huynh.

Writing – original draft: Nga Le, Tien Huynh.

Writing – review & editing: Phuong Nguyen, Nga Le, Hoa Tran.

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