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Applying Career Concepts to Strengthen the Work-Attitudes of Service Professionals

Kate Walsh

Cornell University School of Hotel Administration, kmw33@cornell.edu

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Keywords

organizational commitment, turnover intention, service professionals, career commitment

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Kate Walsh

School of Hotel Administration, Cornell University

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Abstract

Given the nature of employment relationships today, service organizations can strengthen the organization commitment levels and reduce the turnover intentions of its professionals through providing job features important to their careers. These features include opportunities to perform challenging work, experience trusting relationships with customers/clients, and obtain extrinsic rewards. Using a sample of alumni from a hospitality business program, hypotheses that these features impact organizational commitment and turnover intentions, partially through strengthening professionals' career commitment, are developed and tested. Findings suggest that challenging work opportunities impact these attitudes both directly and indirectly. So too trusting relationships with customers and clients indirectly impact organization commitment and intent to turnover (ITO). Results also suggest that, as a whole, satisfaction with extrinsic rewards has no effect. However, an analysis of multigroup mediation results revealed that for professionals working in professional service firms, satisfaction with pay reduces both attitudes. Implications for research in organization commitment and ITO, specifically the role and impact of career-based antecedents, are discussed.

Keywords: Organizational commitment; turnover intention; service professionals; career commitment

Introduction

Organizational commitment (OC) and intent to turnover (ITO) are two of the most comprehensively examined employee attitudes in organizational research. Numerous studies have examined the driving antecedents, nature and outcomes of these phenomena, including ways in which organizations can foster the former and reduce the latter (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Yet, this field of research has reached a turning point, as the nature of employment relationships has shifted (Klein, Molloy, & Brinsfield, 2012). Gone are the days when individuals work for one or two employers over the course of their careers. In fact, today, most professionals drive their own careers and in doing so, often leave their commitment to their organizations behind, as they switch employers and even lines of work, for new and different opportunities (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). This shift in the nature of contemporary careers implies that professionals' attitudes about their OC levels and their intentions to remain as organizational members are also likely to change (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009; Klein et al., 2012); yet, we do not know what, if anything, organizations can do to prevent this shift from occurring, and encourage professionals to build their careers in-house. In this paper, I consider the question: what are service professionals seeking from their jobs in the context of the employment exchange? I examine the specific job features important to service professionals and their impact on their organizational attitudes. The goal is to understand the job features that drive service professionals to become committed to their organizations and want to remain with them. In doing so, I offer new ideas for research in OC and ITO, specifically the role and impact of key career-driven antecedents.

Examining the perspective of service professionals—and the impact of these perspectives—is an untapped area in service-based research, whether these professionals apply knowledge-based expertise to address clients' needs in professional service firms (PSFs), or organize and manage the employee-customer exchange in customer service firms. While some research has examined the experience of working in PSFs (such as law and consulting firms) (Lowendahl, Revang, & Fosstenlokken, 2001), the perspective of professionals who build careers in operationally based, customer service organizations has all but been ignored. (An exception is Burgess's (2012) work.) This particular group of professionals often works extremely long hours on shifting schedules that can include weekends and holidays. While directing their staff, they often must work alongside them to simultaneously handle multiple service issues. The nature of this work, coupled with the rewards it provides (or lack thereof), can make it challenging for professionals to stay committed to their organizations and develop satisfying, sustained careers in services; on average, over 25% of them leave their companies each year (Tracey & Hinkin, 2008), and many often choose to find work in alternative industries. Given this tendency to exit, the services field could benefit from an examination of career issues salient for these and all types of service professionals.

Research in self-directed careers suggests that professionals manage their own career paths (Hall, 1996) and in doing so, enter into resource-exchange relationships with their organizations, whereby they trade their skills and expertise for a salary and opportunity to obtain experience, enhance their human capital and remain marketable (Hall, 1996; Sullivan, Carden, & Martin, 1998). This contemporary employment relationship suggests that service professionals are likely looking for resource-exchanges that offer three job features (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). The first is the opportunity to perform intrinsically challenging work, which is defined as work

that enables professionals to strengthen their human capital. The second is the chance to develop mutually supportive and trusting work-exchanges with others (Sullivan et al., 1998). I show how, for service professionals, a salient group is actually customers and clients. And the third is the prospect of receiving extrinsic rewards that enable professionals to maintain their preferred lifestyles. I suggest that the presence of these job features will act as key drivers of professionals' levels of OC and turnover intentions. I also argue that these processes will be mediated by the degree to which professionals are committed to their own careers. Finally, I explore if these relationships differ for service professionals who work in PSFs versus those who work in customer service firms. In doing so, I examine the impact of self-managed careers in driving commitment and turnover intentions, and explore the role that customers and clients may play in this process.

Theoretical background

OC and ITO are two of the most comprehensively examined phenomena in management science (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday et al., 1982). OC represents a multidimensional psychological attachment of an individual to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997), and it captures the strong regard individuals develop toward organizational membership that is reflected in their hard work and agreement with their organization's goals and values (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Numerous studies have examined the specific components of this construct, and its positive impact on important organizational outcomes, such as motivation, job satisfaction and performance (i.e. Meyer & Allen, 1997; Ng, 2015). So too, intention to quit represents a form of voluntary turnover, whose impact has been extensively studied, even from

the customer perspective (Dawley, Houghton, & Bucklew, 2010). Recent work has tied employee attrition to decreased customer brand images, decreased productivity and even lower firm profitability (Subramony & Holtom, 2012).

In exploring the factors that foster OC and ITO, abundant research has focused on both individual characteristics, such as one's age, gender and marital status, personal values and work ethic, as well as driving organizational antecedents, including organizational citizenship behaviors, distributive justice, positive relationships with supervisors (LMX), empowerment and a supportive culture/climate (Dawley et al., 2010; Klein et al., 2012). A metaanalytic review by Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, and Topolnytsky (2002) concluded that the influential forces behind OC were clearly organizational experiences, above and beyond personal characteristics, and even recruitment and selection practices. Meyer et al. (2002) and others argue that a key organizational antecedent is when an employee feels a sense of perceived organizational support (POS), a signal that, as part of the employment relationship, the organization is committed to investing in the work relationship, long-term (Vandenberghe, Bentein, & Stinglhamber, 2004). To the degree employees perceive this sense of investment in and support of them, their commitment levels will be higher and their turnover intentions will be lower (Dawley et al., 2010).

Yet, despite its long and comprehensive research stream, recent reviews of both OC and ITO highlighted the need to reexamine the relevance of the constructs, including their antecedents, especially in light of changes in today's employment relationships (Zhao & Zhou, 2008). Previous work has been based on the premise that individuals trade long-term employment in return for their loyalty and commitment to their organizations (Klein et al., 2012). In today's employment context, however, few professionals remain with one employer

throughout the course of their careers, and alternatively most manage their own job opportunities, whether temporary or permanent, part-time or full-time, flexible or consistent (Kondratuk, Hausdorf, Korabik, & Rosin, 2004). Indeed, career researchers (i.e. Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 1996, 2002) have asserted that professionals consciously drive and even reinvent their own careers, a phenomenon often termed self-directed or 'boundaryless careers' referring to the notion that careers cross over jobs and organizations (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). In doing so, individuals seek work with organizations that provide them with factors important to their idea of career success, and notions of being on a defined organizational path are less relevant; instead of job-security, self-directed individuals seek to develop transferable skills for their next positions, as they pursue their varied interests and goals (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Sullivan et al., 1998).

These concepts would suggest that solely examining traditional organizational antecedents of OC and ITO misses a host of relevant factors related to individuals' careers and work-lives, as they are experienced today (Klein et al., 2012). Indeed, more recent work is beginning to consider how factors outside the organization, such as new forms of employment, as well as perceptions of job growth, mobility and even labor market opportunities, are impacting individuals' commitment to their organizations, as well as their likelihood of remaining with them (i.e. Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011; Weng, McElroy, Morrow, & Liu, 2010). Some even suggest that reinforcing OC today is a major organizational challenge, and one that may not even be obtainable (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Klein et al., 2012).

This paper calls to question this claim. While this recent work has presented a host of reasons why traditional drivers of OC and ITO may have shifted, none of it has considered the job features that may be relevant for and impact the viewpoints of today's career professionals. In

other words, no work has examined what organizations can do to provide attractive jobs that foster these attitudes. Professionals still engage in work-exchanges, whereby they trade their human capital for specific features in their jobs, and obtaining these features, even as a possible form of POS, likely impacts their organizational attitudes (Shore, Tetrick, Lynch, & Barksdale, 2006). This lack of consideration prompts the questions: what matters most to service professionals? What are they seeking from their organizations in the context of the work-exchange? And how does providing these job features impact key organizational attitudes, such as OC and ITO?

As mentioned, applying research in self-directed careers (i.e. Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006), I will argue that service professionals are seeking job features important to meeting their career goals; yet, in considering these issues for service professionals, I note an important distinction. Service-based work involves co-creating an intangible experience - with a tangible outcome - with a client or customer (Bowen & Schneider, 1988). The process requires an individual to engage with another, whereby the relationship becomes the medium for the exchange (Reihlen & Apel, 2007). This brings a new factor into the equation: what role do non-organizational members play in contributing to job features central to service professionals and important to their organizational attitudes? Specifically, how do customers/clients, as well as other salient job features, impact OC and ITO? I explore these questions through the conceptual model (depicted in Figure 1), and the development of four underlying sets of hypotheses.

Hypotheses

Self-directed career theory offers that individuals continuously evaluate if their current jobs meet their needs, and are more likely to become disenchanted and switch employers if they do not (Briscoe et al., 2006). Yet, there may exist relevant job features that enable service professionals to develop their careers and simultaneously positively impact the work attitudes discussed above. The first is a socioeconomic job feature: challenge in their work. A socioeconomic job feature refers to an attribute of a job that can signal investment and support from the organization beyond one's compensation, and as I will argue, in ways that foster professionals' commitment and intentions to stay (Dawley et al., 2010).

Insert Figure 1

Challenging work

A job feature central to those who self-manage their careers is the opportunity to experience challenge in their work. Challenging work refers to jobs that enable professionals to widen their toolkit of knowledge, skills and abilities, in essence strengthen their human capital. By doing so, they increase their own marketability for new opportunities. Thus, it is central to those who self-manage their careers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). In addition, because professionals are more likely to be more emotionally attached to their jobs than their organizations, they are also more likely to identify and be involved with the work that they do (Hall, 2002). For example, rather than saying, 'I work for a financial advising firm,' or 'I am a financial director,' professionals are more likely to say, 'I do work with investments.' The opportunity to be engaged in and challenged by one's work, and grow in a chosen field, fuels this work identity.

This line of thought would certainly be supported by research in the professions (Abbott, 1988). This work offers that professionals deliver a knowledge-based expertise whereby they apply judgment to isolate and solve a complex problem (Lowendahl et al., 2001). Because each client's needs are unique, the degree of both training for and complexity involved in the service experience is quite high. The service interaction requires an elevated degree of customization, applied expertise and even personal judgment on the part of the professional, and clients depend on the professional for this knowledge (Jaakkola & Halinen, 2006). Without a doubt, the ability of its professionals to apply knowledge is a PSF's key to success (von Nordenflycht, 2010).

I would expect that the challenge inherent in this complex form of problem-solving would lead professionals to want to continue with this form of work, as it expands their skills and supports their identities. I would also expect that if they experience it as members of their organizations, they will be more committed to them and less likely to leave. This is because service professionals in PSFs are likely performing work where challenge is an inherent part of what they do. Because their work is so central to their professional identity, they will be committed to the organizations that provide the opportunity and setting to perform that work, and less likely to want to leave them (Buse, Bilimoria, & Perelli, 2013).

While professionals who work in customer service and other firms are not members of a professional organization per se, they are still performing challenging work. Indeed an employee's ability to manage an encounter and essentially keep a company's service promise is dependent on how well the organization establishes appropriate processes, including recruitment, training and reward systems, all responsibilities of an organization's leadership or service-management professionals (Bitner, 1995). These responsibilities represent a complex form of knowledge-based work essential for personalized service delivery (Beliveau, 2013). I would thus

argue that the challenge of organizing a complex, interrelated service system, while different from a professional expertise, can also be a mentally rigorous form of work, and that professionals who perform this type of work are attracted to the challenge inherent in creating and sustaining service systems. They are also likely to care about this feature of their jobs.

This line of thinking leads to the first set of research hypotheses. I argue that to the degree professionals experience challenge in their work, they will be more committed to their organizations. This logic is based on the idea that work-challenge represents a socioeconomic investment made by the organization (Shore et al., 2006). By offering these types of work opportunities, the organization is enabling its professionals to develop their human capital and prepare themselves for future work, whether or not this work is inside the firm. However, the irony of providing challenging work is that because it contributes to professionals' skill development and ultimate marketability, I believe it will deepen their commitment to their organizations, as well as lower their turnover intentions. Stated more formally:

Hypothesis 1a: The more service professionals experience challenge in their work, the higher their OC.

Hypothesis 1b: The more service professionals experience challenge in their work, the lower their turnover intentions.

Trusting work relationships with clients and customers

The second set of hypotheses is based on the concept of trust. Defined as 'the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party, based on the expectation that the other

will perform a particular action important to the trustor' (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 172), trust is usually considered an internal construct that impacts employee attitudes. That is, trust has been viewed as the underlying core of the socioeconomic work relationship (Shore et al., 2006). Based upon the series of investment displayed by the organization, employees will develop a sense of faith in their employers' goodwill, which will encourage them to reciprocate and engage in relational contracts with their organizations in ways that positively impact their OC and ITO (DeMeuse, Bergmann, & Lester, 2001). However, trust outside of the organization can have similar benefits. In support of Arthur, Khapova, and Wilderom's (2005) arguments that many positive work relationships extend beyond the organization, I suggest that service professionals, and their organizations, benefit when professionals form trusting work relationships with their customers and clients.

Because the nature of service-based work requires service professionals in PSFs to co-create the service exchange with clients, as they deliver a knowledge-based expertise, they are likely to be, over time, intimately involved with their clients' needs. Indeed, customers and clients are central contributors to the service experience (Bitner, Faranda, Hubbet, & Zeithaml, 1997), and their contributions increase the degree of risk involved; the professional must rely on other another party, in this case, an outsider customer or client, to share appropriate information and use the professional's time and expertise efficiently. If a relationship with a customer/client is founded on trust, the risk of being vulnerable to an unsatisfactory or taxing service exchange, and ultimately, an unsatisfactory service relationship, is reduced. Thus, from the professional's perspective, trust is essential to creating a productive long-term service relationship because without it, there are very little control mechanisms in place other than 'firing' the client or customer (Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007).

I would also expect that the presence of trust positively impacts service professionals' attitudes toward their organizations. If their working relationship is categorized by a sense of confidence that the customer/client knows how to efficiently interact with professionals, as they co-create the service, professionals are likely to want to maintain these relationships. The cost (in terms of time, energy and expense) of developing new relationships would outweigh the potential benefits. As the organization provides the setting, structure and business purpose for the exchange, if service professionals experience trusting relationships with customers/clients, they are more likely to identify with organizational membership and agree with its goals and purpose, in essence be more committed to the companies providing the opportunity. They are also less likely to leave them. (While some professionals take their client base with them when they leave their firms, in practice, this is often difficult to do.)

This relationship is likely to also hold for service professionals working in customer service or other types of service firms. It is true that in these types of companies, line-level staff is the first manner of interaction with customers. However, it is also true that service professionals in leadership roles consistently engage with a company's more valuable, long-term customers and clients, as well as the more demanding ones. Undeniably, the essence of choosing a career as a service professional entails an element of understanding and appreciating working with customers and clients (Schneider, 1980). Even if service professionals have less daily contact with their organization's customer base than their line-level staff, they likely still appreciate the same benefits of creating and sustaining trusting customer relationships. They are also likely to be more committed to their organizations that provide the service concept and setting, and so too, less likely to intend to leave. Thus, similar to research examining the impact of positive working relationships (i.e. Becker, 1992), I would argue that the presence of trusting

relationships with customers and clients will strengthen professionals' commitment to their organizations and lower their turnover intentions. Stated more formally:

Hypothesis 2a: The more service professionals experience trusting work relationships with the client/customers, the higher their OC.

Hypothesis 2b: The more service professionals experience trusting work relationships with the client/customers, the lower their turnover intentions.

Extrinsic rewards

At its most basic level, the primary economic reason for securing employment is to obtain resources to support a lifestyle. In a resource-exchange framework, employees trade work for compensation. So, while obtaining a sense of challenge from one's chosen work, and developing trusting relationships with customer and clients is certainly critical, so too is receiving adequate extrinsic rewards in exchange for the work. From an objective and measurable perspective, extrinsic rewards, including salary and benefits, often act as central determinants of perceptions of career success (Arthur et al., 2005).

The notion of self-directed careers, whereby individuals make continuous judgments about their current job against other opportunities (Hall, 2002), suggests that extrinsic rewards should play a role in predicting OC and turnover intentions. Here, I do not draw a distinction for service professionals per se and alternatively argue that all professionals will weigh the net gain, or costs and benefits, associated with their current job in their current organizations, against other potential opportunities. In doing so, they will be determining if better opportunities exist with

other organizations that enable them differentially to obtain or maintain valued extrinsic job factors. I offer that to the degree professionals are able to maximize the extrinsic investment in their careers, they will be less likely to leave their organizations. While we know pay matters (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995), these investments can also relate to benefits and lifestyle (Pfeffer & Lawler, 1980).

Thus, I argue that for professionals, a predictor of their OC and turnover intentions is their current levels of instrumental extrinsic rewards. To the degree individuals perceive that they are receiving rewards that offer the perceived highest net return in exchange for the work they do, they will be more engaged as organizational members, and likely to remain with their companies. They will be exchanging resources from both an economic and socioeconomic perspective with their employers that for the current time frame, keep them committed to and with their organizations. This argument leads to the third set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a: The more service professionals experience satisfying levels of extrinsic rewards, the higher their OC.

Hypothesis 3b: The more service professionals experience satisfying levels of extrinsic rewards, the lower their turnover intentions.

Mediating effects of career commitment

Finally, given that professionals seek work that enables them to achieve success with their careers, I offer that the process through which these job features impact work attitudes occurs through strengthening career commitment. Career commitment refers to the motivation to

work in a chosen field (Aryee & Tan, 1992). Others have called it 'the development of personal career goals, the attachment to, identification with and involvement with those goals' (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990, p. 59). These goals transcend one's job or even occupation; because professionals identify with their chosen careers, they are highly motivated to achieve these related goals (Goulet & Singh, 2002). That is, when professionals are committed to their careers, they are likely to persist in acquiring knowledge and developing expertise related to their work, even when they encounter obstacles or setbacks (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Goulet & Singh, 2002). Commitment to their careers becomes a driving force in their decision making and shapes the choices professionals make as they pursue various job and occupational opportunities (Duffy et al., 2011). While some have claimed that career commitment is related to occupational commitment and even job involvement, research has demonstrated that the phenomenon is a distinct force shaping professionals' career choices (Chang, 1999).

I would expect that career commitment impacts the degree to which professionals remain committed to and employed with their organizations. In fact, I contend that the process through which the presence of job features impacts professionals' OC and ITO levels occurs through strengthening their commitment to their careers. These job features enable professionals to realize the career goals embedded in their career commitment levels, especially the degree to which they identify themselves as professionals. For example, obtaining knowledge and developing skills and expertise through challenging work would strengthen professionals' knowledge, skills and expertise in their chosen line of work. Experiencing trusting relationships with customers/clients would enable professionals' to enact their careers in meaningful ways, and obtaining satisfying levels of extrinsic rewards would enable professionals to achieve career/life goals. All these are components of and are reflected in commitment to one's career (Aryee &

Tan, 1992; Goulet & Singh, 2002). Obtaining work characterized by these job features enables professionals to strengthen their own career commitment levels.

Thus, I would expect career commitment to mediate the relationship between the job features identified and OC or turnover intentions. My logic is based on the work-exchange concept that, if professionals obtain valued job features, they will be fueling their attachment to their own chosen line of work. Through this process, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward organizations that provide these features and enable them to manage and develop attachment to their careers (Hackett, Lapierre, & Hausdorf, 2001). Stated another way, their organizations become the setting for which these professionals can strengthen their own motivation to enriching their careers. Specifically, I hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4a: Career commitment will mediate the effects of challenging work, trusting relationships with clients/customers and extrinsic rewards on OC.

Hypothesis 4b: Career commitment will mediate the effects of challenging work, trusting relationships with clients/customers and extrinsic rewards on turnover intentions.

As part of the analyses, I plan to explore the mediated effect of these job features on employee attitudes along two groups of service professionals: those working in PSFs versus those working in managerial/leadership roles in customer service firms. While I make no a priori hypotheses surrounding expected differences between these two groups, I thought it useful to conduct exploratory analyses.

Methods

Sample

To examine the impact of self-directed careers on service professionals' work attitudes, I needed to obtain access to a professionally educated group working in both PSFs and in managerial/leadership roles in customer service firms. Using a two-wave, web-based survey, I sampled 2951 alumni who graduated with a BS or master's degree (between 1987 and 2003) from a hospitality-based business program of a major university. Upon graduation from the institution, these individuals pursued positions in financial consulting, real estate consulting, hospitality operations and restaurant management. Because I used an alumni database for the population, I was able to identify both the type of work respondents were doing and the type of companies who employed them.

A guiding assumption of this study is that college-educated service professionals are likely enacting their careers in a self-directed manner. These individuals have the prospect of performing work that is based on their own sets of values that extend beyond earning a living wage; in addition, they can independently manage their careers (Briscoe et al., 2006). While not all are members of PSFs, they are performing work that is knowledge-intensive and contributing to their transferable skillsets. Indeed, work on professional bureaucracies examines the roles of professionals working within traditional organizations (von Nordenflycht, 2010). Thus, it is likely more the norm than the exception that self-directed professionals work in firms other than solely PSFs.

During the first wave of this study, conducted in Fall 2004, I measured the independent and mediating variables, as well as collected basic demographic data (i.e. age, gender, education level, no. of years in current job, no. of jobs since graduation, no. of companies since graduation,

and salary, using a 5-point range, where salary levels were divided into 5 categories ranging from 0 to above \$130,000). I received 718 replies to the original survey, reflecting a response rate of 24.3%. Respondents were told that they would receive a follow-up survey and in early 2004, four months after the original survey date, I sent the follow-up survey to the 718 alumni who responded to the first survey. In this survey, I once again measured the mediating variable, as well as the dependent variables.

Of the 718 alumni surveyed, 397 responded, representing a response rate of 55.3%. These 397 individuals represent a 13.5% response rate from the original sample. I reviewed the job titles and companies of each respondent and eliminated 10 cases for those that were not working in services. Of the remaining 387, I categorized 177 (46%) as working directly in managerial/leadership roles in service operations, 138 (36%) as working directly in financial services and professional consulting, and 72 (18%) as working in the services industry in marketing, radio, education and non-for-profit firms. As part of this analysis, I also reviewed their job titles to ensure that they were consistent with forms of professionally educated work.

Overall, respondents primarily resided in North America (84%). The average age was 31.8 years and 50% were male. Forty-two percent of respondents reported earning between 51,000 and 100,000 (USD) (two categories), 14% reported earning between 100,000 and 130,000 and an additional 14% reported earning over 130,000. Over 61% or 238 respondents indicated that their highest level of education was a BS degree, and 32% or 122 had earned a master's degree. On average, respondents had been working for their current employer for 3.8 years - in 2.6 different jobs - and had been in their current job for 2.6 years. Since graduation, they had worked an average of four jobs in three companies.

To examine non-response bias, I compared the demographics of the sample to the data of the entire population. To the degree possible, I categorized the company of each individual in the population, as I did not have this data for 22% of alumni. For the remaining 78% (2478), 42% (1041) were categorized as working in service operations, 31% (768) as working in financial services and professional consulting, and 21% (520) as working in other services. The remaining 6% were categorized as working in manufacturing. Seventy percent of the population resided in North America. The mean age of the population (40) was slightly higher than the mean age of the sample (31.8); however, almost identical to the sample, 51% were male. Overall, the sample is generally representative of the population.

Measures

Independent variables. Challenging work. The presence of challenging work was assessed using a five-item measure originally developed by Kickul (2001). Respondents were asked to rate on a five-point scale (1 = does not provide, 5 = completely provides) the degree to which their current work provides them with the following: the opportunity to participate in decision making, the opportunity to develop new skills, increasing job responsibilities, autonomy and control over their work, and the opportunity to do challenging and interesting work. This measure was used because its components reflect the opportunity for individuals to experience challenge in their work and develop/enhance their own knowledge, skills and abilities. Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .93 and the composite reliability was .84 (see Table 1).

Trusting customer-client relationships. The presence of mutually supportive and trusting work relationships with customers and clients was measured modifying a scale originally

developed by DeMeuse et al. (2001). Using a 1 -5 scale rating, where 1 = not at all describes and 5 = completely describes, respondents were asked to rate the degree their current work-relationship with their customers/clients could be described by the following six characteristics: 'we trust each other,' 'we have confidence in each other's abilities,' 'we communicate openly,' 'we are loyal to each other,' 'we help each other improve,' and 'we are willing to go the extra mile for each other.' Both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for this measure were .89.

Extrinsic rewards. The presence of extrinsic rewards was measured by adapting a scale by Pfeffer and Lawler (1980), whereby I assessed a job along three dimensions: sufficiency of pay, benefits and reputation. Respondents were asked the degree to which they were satisfied (1 = extremely dissatisfied, 5 = extremely satisfied) with receiving the following from their employer: *Pay*: competitive salary, annual bonus, retirement savings plan; *Benefits*: good number of vacation days, medical and dental coverage, life and disability insurance coverage, perks associated with job (i.e. parking, food, free services); *Status*: associated with occupation, employer and job title. While the Cronbach's alpha of the overall scale was strong at .84, an exploratory factor analysis showed that these three categories loaded as separate variables. Thus, I included them in the model as three distinct measures. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were identical and were .77 for pay, .85 for benefits and .84 for status.

Mediating variable. Career commitment was measured using a scale originally developed by Gould (1979). Items used included the following: 'my career gives me a sense of wellbeing,' 'I get a sense of pride from my career,' 'I am sometimes dissatisfied with my career choice (reverse-coded),' 'I identify strongly with my career,' and 'sometimes I wish I had chosen a different career (reverse-coded).' While somewhat dated, I adapted Gould's measure because it reflects the concept of identifying with membership in one's profession and choosing a particular line of

work, and thus believed that it would accurately represent service professionals' commitment to their own careers. Respondents rated these statements from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. As mentioned, this variable was measured in T1 and again in T2. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .78 (in T1) and .83 (in T2). The correlation between the two measures was .63, $p < .001$. The two measures were used to calculate a mean score for each item of career commitment. Composite reliability for this measure was .87

Control variable. I included respondents' age as a control measure.

Dependent variables. OC was measured using Mowday, Steers and Porter's (1979) 9-item measure (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability both = .93) that included questions such as: 'I talk up this company to my friends as a great company to work for,' 'I am willing to put a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this company be successful,' and 'I am proud to tell others that I am part of this company.' Again respondents rated OC on a 1-5 scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. *Organizational turnover intention* was measured using Becker's (1992) scale (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability both = .89). Respondents were asked to respond on a 1-5 scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to the following statements: 'It likely that I will actively look for a new job in the next year,' 'I often think about quitting,' 'There is not too much to be gained by staying with this organization indefinitely,' and 'It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave this organization.'

Insert Table 1

Data analysis

The hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) in Amos, version 21.0. SEM is argued to be one of the best strategies for testing mediated models (Cheung & Lau, 2008), and I did so by inferring relationships of the predicted variables collected at T1, on the dependent variables, collected at T2.

One point of concern is that all of the data are self-reported and same source, exposing the possibility of common method bias. The nature of the research question necessitated that I collect attitudinal data, and thus common bias was inevitable. In part, longitudinal data help address this concern (Fisher, 1986). The data do come from two different time periods, and the independent variables for the hypotheses were primarily collected at a different time from the dependent variables, supporting a design that required self-report data but minimized the accompanying partiality (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). In addition, a review of the measurement model (discussed next) demonstrates that the measures exhibit sound construct validity and conceptually do not overlap (Conway & Lance, 2010). However, to help address this issue, I controlled for age, a variable likely to be similarly affected by any potential common method variance (CMV). As Siemsen, Roth, and Oliveira (2010) argue, the bias decreases as a larger number of variables affected by CMV are included in the equation. I also considered including a common source latent variable in the model (Podsakoff et al., 2012). However, the presence of the variable did not alter any of the standardized regression weights of the other variables by more than .20, and thus its presence was not necessary. While results do not completely rule out the presence of common method bias, they do suggest that the likelihood of bias confounding the results is low (Doty & Glick, 1998). Overall, the methods used help mitigate this common challenge embedded in attitudinal-based research.

Results

Test of the measurement model

Summary statistics—including means, standard deviations and correlations—of the variables analyzed are reported in Table 1. I first performed a confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood estimation. My purpose was to analyze the factor structures of the latent variables to validate the constructs, as well as ensure that they were distinct from one another. When analyzing the measurement model, I noted that the third scale item of OC loaded low at .46 and thus, it was removed from the overall measure of OC. (The Cronbach's alpha score improved .08, but overall remained at .93. Composite reliability also did not change.) The revised model yielded an acceptable fit ($X^2(486, N = 387) = 731.29, p < .001, X^2/df = 1.50, TLI = .96, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .036$). As can be noted on Table 2, the both the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability estimate for each scale were above 0.70, indicating internal consistency for each construct. To assess convergent validity, I examined the magnitude, as well as the statistical significance of the factor loading estimates. The average loading size is .77, above the .70 cut-off suggested by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010), and after removing the one item mentioned above, all items had standardized loadings above .50, $p < .001$ (Baggozi & Yi, 1988). Furthermore, the average variance extracted for each construct was above 0.5, also supporting convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In support of discriminant validity, the average variance extracted for each construct exceeded the squared correlation coefficient between all pairs of each construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All in all, results supported construct validity.

Also, because I was performing exploratory analyses examining multigroup mediation, I tested the model for measurement invariance across respondents working in PSFs versus customer service firms. This is a necessary step before examining the relationship between the latent constructs in the structural model (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). To do so, I compared the chi-square difference of an unconstrained multigroup model versus a fully constrained multigroup measurement model and noted that they were not statistically different. In addition, the fully constrained measurement model had good fit statistics, indicating measurement invariance.

Insert Table 2

Test of the structural model

To test the hypotheses, I created a mediated model with bootstrapping (2000, 95% confidence interval). The bootstrapping method is argued to be the strongest method to examine mediation (Hayes, 2009), and using an approach advocated by Zhao et al. (2010), I examined both the direct and indirect effect simultaneously; the presence of mediation was determined through examining the indirect effects. (Zhao et al. (2010) argue that there is no need to test for the presence of a significant zero-order effect of the predictors on the dependent variables prior to testing for a mediated effect.) The full model yielded an acceptable fit ($X^2(485, N = 387) = 766.81, p < .001, X^2/df = 1.58, TLI = .96, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .039$).

I first examined the direct effects of the three job features (challenging work, trusting relationships with customers/clients, extrinsic rewards) predicted to impact OC and ITO. As can

be noted in Table 3, challenging work is a statistically significant predictor of both OC (.28, $p < .001$) and ITO ($-.17, p < .01$), supporting both *H1a* and *H1b*. Trusting relationships with customers/clients is not a statistically significant predictor of either OC or ITO; thus, *H2a* and *H2b* were not supported. For *H3a* and *H3b*, none of the variables were found to directly impact OC or turnover. Also note that age, the control variable, was not a statistically significant predictor of either OC or ITO.

However, I also examined the indirect effects of these variables through strengthening career commitment and found the presence of additional relationships. As can be noted in Table 3, career commitment partially mediates the effects of challenging work on OC and ITO. The .23 ($p < .01$) direct effect of challenging work on career commitment leads to an overall indirect effect of .13 ($p < .01$), supporting complementary mediation. This occurs when the mediated effect and direct effect both exist and point to the same direction (Zhao et al., 2010). So too, career commitment partially mediates the effects of challenging work on ITO ($-.09, p < .01$), again supporting complementary mediation.

In addition, the indirect effects of trusting relationships with customers/clients on OC are significant. Specifically, trusting relationships increase career commitment (.15, $p < .01$), which in turn, impacts OC (.55, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of .08 is significant at $p < .05$, supporting indirect-only mediation. So too career commitment indirectly mediates the effects of trusting work relationships on ITO. The direct effect of career commitment on ITO is $-.38$ ($p < .001$), making the indirect effect of trusting relationships on ITO $-.06$ ($p < .05$). Finally, career commitment does not mediate the relationship between extrinsic rewards and ITO. While career commitment strongly predicts ITO, the relationship between the three forms of extrinsic

rewards and career commitment was not significant. In all, findings provide partial support for *H4a* and *H4b*.

Insert Table 3

Supplemental analyses

To determine if the effects differed by type of service professional, I also performed multigroup, mediated analysis. To examine this form of moderated mediation (MacKinnon & Fairchild, 2009), the model was run by the two groups in AMOS. I constrained each predicted path in the model and examined the standardized z -scores of the critical ratios of differences between identical parameters in each group to see if they differed in a statistically significant manner. The effect of challenging work on ITO was stronger for service professionals in customer service firms than for those in PSFs (standardized beta coefficient of $-.34$ ($p < .01$) vs. $-.08$ ($p < .05$)). The z -score for this parameter was -3.25 , which means that the coefficient is significant at $p < .001$.

Also, the path between pay and ITO differed by groups (z -score = 3.03 or $p < .001$). While the path was not significant for those in customer service firms, it was for those in PSFs ($-.44$, $p < .001$). In a similar manner, the path between pay and OC was stronger for those in PSFs (z -score = 2.56 or $p < .01$). While this path was not significant for those working in customer service firms, it was actually negative for those in PSFs ($-.28$, $p < .05$). Finally, a similar pattern occurred for the path from pay to career commitment. While the path was not significant for those working in customer service firms, it was significant for those in PSFs ($.45$, $p < .01$, z -

score = 2.55 or $p < .05$). As a point of further analysis, a t -test revealed that the current salary of the two groups differed in a statistically significant manner ($p < .001$). Of the six-point scale for salary, the mean salary for those working in customer service firms was 3.41 (range of 51-70K), compared to 4.17 (range of 71-100K) for those in PSFs.

Discussion

Findings suggest that the career-based job features examined in this study are indeed impacting key attitudes for professionals working in service firms. Results indicate that the strongest predictor of professionals' commitment levels, as well as their intentions to leave their organizations, is the degree to which they experience challenge in their work. This effect was both direct and indirect, that is occurring directly, as well as through strengthening one's career commitment. The effect is especially salient for those professionals working in customer service firms. Not surprisingly, this group earns less money than their PSFs counterparts. It may be the case that their organizations cannot as easily address this need for challenge as PSFs can, or alternatively, that challenge may be a more salient need to compensate for accepting lower pay. In either case, the presence of this job feature strengthens not only professionals' commitment to their own careers, but also their attitudes toward their employers.

Findings also revealed that trusting relationships with customers and clients do indeed matter, yet not in a direct manner. The impact of trusting relationships with customers and clients occurs through strengthening career commitment alone, which in turn, increases OC and lowers turnover intentions. These types of relationships fuel professionals' commitment to their own careers; it could be the case that these positive service exchanges with customers and clients

reaffirm for professionals how satisfying their careers are from an emotional standpoint, and thus how committed they are to their line of work. This in turn, could strengthen their attitudes about their employers.

While extrinsic rewards were not shown to impact commitment and turnover intentions, multigroup analysis revealed that, for those who work in PSFs, they very much do. Indeed, satisfaction with rewards in the form of pay lowers turnover intentions for this group. It also lowers their OC. The nature of professional work, which involves delivering a knowledge-based expertise to a clientele, could mean that these types of service professionals would find their accompanying pay even more salient than those working in customer service firms. This argument is based on the notion that as a form of human capital, professional expertise is of greater value and ostensibly, more difficult to acquire, than the expertise required to manage customer service exchanges. As such, for these types of professionals, pay acts as a higher proxy and signal of their human capital and overall work identity; thus, obtaining a higher salary may actually be a stronger driver of their career decisions. These professionals could also be more cognizant of opportunities outside of their firms that would offer higher rewards for their human capital and as a result, they may identify less with organizational membership and be less committed. Interestingly, for those working in PSFs, satisfaction with pay fuels their own commitment to their careers. While those leading service operations would likely also prefer to obtain the highest rewards for the work-exchange, we did not see an effect on any of the attitudes we examined. This may be because professionals in customer service firms accept that their form of actual pay may be lower relative to other forms of professional work, and as a result, they may seek employment based on different notions of success, such as challenging work. The role of pay and what it signals to and means for professionals is an area that bears further investigation.

Implications for research in organizational commitment and intent to turnover

These findings have implications for research in both OC and ITO. This paper responds to a call to reconsider the relevance of OC, given the nature of how employment relationships have shifted and contemporary careers are enacted. Indeed, the premise that OC can even be developed has been called into question (Meyer et al., 2002). Interestingly, though, when Briscoe and Finkelstein (2009) examined the career-OC link, they found that contrary to their arguments that it would have negative implications, boundaryless and protean career mindsets did not impact OC. They suggest that their lack of finding 'defeats a major stereotype of "new career" actions as simple free agents who are not interested in establishing committed relationships and who will take the first opportunity to leave that arises' (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009, p. 254). So too Weng et al. (2010) found that employees' perceptions of career growth within their organizations fueled their commitment levels. Findings in this study support this notion, and yet I develop the ideas even further and in specific ways. Through identifying relevant job features, I show how, given their commitment to their careers, professionals are seeking organizations where they can enact them. And in doing so, these professionals become even more committed to their organizations, and are less likely to leave them. This finding is counterintuitive to contemporary career logic and highlights the paper's contribution to research in the OC and ITO literatures.

Specifically, both OC and ITO researchers have noted that, as part of the employment relationship, a sense of POS is a key antecedent to strengthening employees' levels of OC and reducing their turnover intentions (Dawley et al., 2010; Meyer et al., 2002; Vandenberghe et al.,

2004). Findings in this study suggest that POS may not just or even come from traditionally viewed antecedents, such as procedural justice or strong supervisory relationships. Indeed, based on the nature of today's employment relationships, more meaningful types of support may be when organizations offer work that is characterized by the job features identified in this study, as these features potentially enhance the careers of professionals in significant and perhaps even long-term ways. Results support this notion and suggest that the presence of salient job features, while keeping professionals marketable and strengthening their career commitment, also keeps them more committed to their companies. Yes, these professionals are free agents, but in managing their careers, they are also active organizational members, exchanging human capital for satisfying work opportunities. Findings suggest that these specific job features are potential signals of POS that can strengthen the employment relationship as it is experienced today. Findings also provide clarity to the confusion surrounding the careers-OC link.

So too this work has implications for research in ITO. Interestingly, I could not locate a study that examined the nature of careers today on turnover intentions or rates. While career-based research implies that organizational turnover would likely be higher, as professionals seize different opportunities in a boundaryless-manner, these results point to just the opposite. While I only examined ITO, and not actual turnover rates, findings do suggest that when offering professionals job features important to their careers, organizations are likely not providing long-term job and security; instead, they are offering high immediate inducements in exchange for performance, but in ways that strengthen professionals' work attitudes. Ultimately, given how today's careers are enacted, this is one way that organizations can develop succession plans that fuel employment relationships and keep their talent from walking out the door.

Limitations and future directions

While the ideas in this paper have implications for ways service firms can promote retention at the professional level, I offer some contextual boundary conditions. First, I only examined service professionals in broadly defined types of service firms. A more refined examination of job features important to the careers of different types of service professionals would be an important way to extend this initial study. In addition, the data are only attitudinally based, and thus self-reported, which as previously discussed, leads to the potential of common method bias. Although I took precautions to mitigate this concern, it still remains a limitation. It would be useful to obtain non-attitudinal outcome measures, such as actual turnover, and perform more of a longitudinal study tied to the bottom line. I was surprised at the finding that benefits and status were not significant predictors. It may be that working from home and/or with flex time is not an option for these professionals. Nevertheless, teasing out which job features matter most, and how they might interact with one another, especially as it relates to rewards, represents a key way to build from this study and further our understanding of what contemporary careers mean for both professionals and the service organizations that hire them.

Future work could be framed using the employment relationship as the context, and these career-based jobs features as signals of POS of and investment in professionals. This type of framing would demonstrate how, given today's employment context, OC can still be fostered in meaningful ways, and levels of ITO and actual turnover actually reduced. Such a study would extend that notion that OC is alive and present in today's organizations, even, and perhaps especially when professionals self-manage their own careers.

While the ideas presented have implications for OC and ITO in general, I conclude with an issue identified at the beginning of this paper: how to reduce professionally based turnover in service organizations and encourage professionals to build their careers in-house. While a limitation of this study is that I examined only the attitudes of one particular group, the simultaneous benefit is that I can offer focused suggestions. Ensuring that their jobs, at a minimum, include challenging forms of work can reap benefits in the attitudinal constructs examined, especially for professionals working in customer service firms. So too can providing training to help professionals develop and maintain trusting relationships with their customers and clients, as well as reexamining the complex role of pay in PSFs. The next step is to equate these attitudinal changes to key performance metrics, including actual turnover, in essence, bringing the impact of contemporary careers to the bottom line.

Conclusion

In this article, I extended research in OC and ITO through applying concepts from the self-directed careers framework to highlight ways organizations can foster these key attitudes. Findings suggest that service organizations can strengthen commitment levels and reduce turnover intentions through providing job features that enable their professionals to perform challenging work, and indirectly, create trusting relationships with customers and clients, and for those working in PSFs, satisfying pay. Results suggest that these job features matter for ways professionals manage their careers and seek-out organizations, and they have implications for ways service organizations can help professionals build their own careers in-house, and ultimately strengthen the depth and breadth of expertise in this ever-expanding industry.

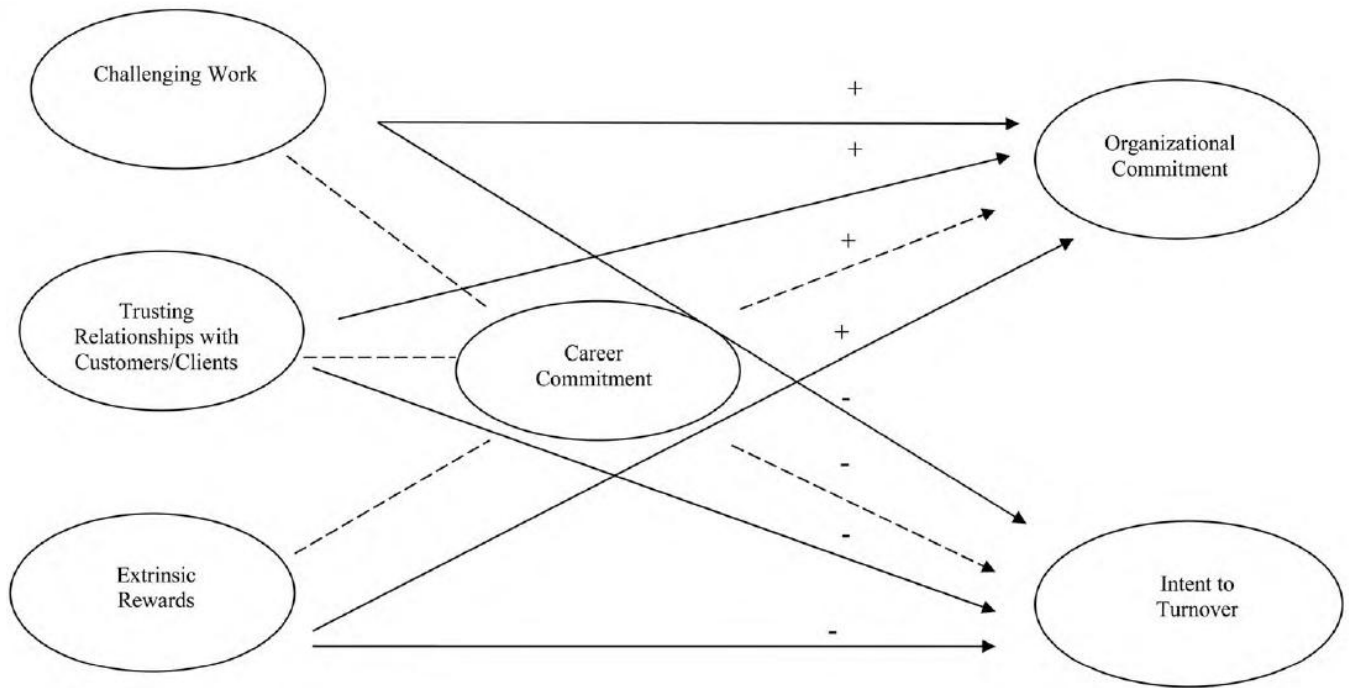


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model.

Note: Dashed lines represent indirect paths through career commitment.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Turnover Intentions	2.41	1.09	1.00								
2. Org. Commitment	3.59	0.79	-0.68	1.00							
3. Challenging Work	3.70	0.78	-0.45	0.49	1.00						
4. Trust w/Cus & Clients	3.55	0.77	-0.19	0.21	0.23	1.00					
5. Extrinsic Rewards-M	3.54	0.78	-0.38	0.30	0.19	0.41	1.00				
6. Extrinsic Rewards-B	3.86	0.74	-0.33	0.16	0.12	0.34	0.58	1.00			
7. Extrinsic Rewards-S	3.61	0.71	-0.34	0.35	0.09	0.55	0.53	0.33	1.00		
8. Career Commitment	3.68	0.69	-0.41	0.45	0.23	0.33	0.20	0.16	0.18	1.00	
9. Age	31.9	6.64	-0.14	0.07	0.13	0.08	0.13	0.05	0.01	0.12	1.00

Notes: $N = 387$. Correlations above .21 are significant at $p < .001$, correlations above .12 are significant at $p < .01$, and correlations above .10 are significant at $p < .05$.

Table 2. Properties of measurement model.

	Standardized factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
<i>Challenging Work</i>		.93	.84	.51
C1	0.69			
C2	0.72			
C3	0.69			
C4	0.55			
C5	0.89			
<i>Trusting Relationships w/Customers/Clients</i>		0.89	0.89	0.55
T1	0.77			
T2	0.78			
T3	0.88			
T4	0.60			
T5	0.72			
T6	0.70			
<i>Pay</i>		.77	.77	.63
P1	0.79			
P2	0.80			
P3				
<i>Benefits</i>		.85	.85	.66
B1	0.91			
B2	0.75			
B3	0.77			
<i>Status</i>		.84	.84	.65
S1	0.77			
S2	0.80			
S3	0.84			
<i>Career Commitment</i>		.78 – T1 .83 – T2	.87	.69
CC1	0.86			
CC2	0.89			
CC3	0.72			
CC4	0.68			
CC5	0.76			
<i>Organizational Commitment</i>		.93	.93	.59
OC1	0.71			
OC2	0.80			
OC4	0.81			
OC5	0.82			
OC6	0.83			
OC7	0.82			
OC8	0.79			
OC9	0.81			
<i>Intent to Turnover</i>		0.89	0.89	0.68
IT01	0.88			
IT02	0.84			
IT03	0.77			
IT04	0.80			

Table 3. Standardized estimates and fit indices.

Estimated path	Direct effects		Indirect effects Standardized coefficient
	Standardized coefficient	t-Value	
Challenging Work → OC	.28***	4.09	.13**
Challenging Work → ITO	-.17***	-2.38	-.09**
Challenging Work → CC	.23**	3.00	
Trusting Customers/Clients → OC	ns		.08*
Trusting Customers/Clients → ITO	ns		-.06*
Trusting Customers/Clients → CC	.15**	2.60	
Pay → OC	ns		
Pay → ITO	ns		
Pay → CC	ns		
Benefits → OC	ns		
Benefits → ITO	ns		
Benefits → CC	ns		
Status → OC	ns		
Status → ITO	ns		
Status → CC	ns		
CC → OC	.55***	9.56	
CC → ITO	-.38***	-6.74	

Note: $\chi^2(485, N = 387) = 766.81, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 1.58, TLI = .96, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .039.$

OC, Organizational Commitment; ITO, Intent to Turnover; CC, Career Commitment.

* $p < .05.$

** $p < .01.$

*** $p < .001.$

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