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Article in *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings* · January 2015

DOI: 10.5465/AMBPP.2015.12265abstract

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# The Effects of Proximal Withdrawal States on Job Attitudes, Job Searching, Intent to Leave, and Employee Turnover

Junchao (Jason) Li, Thomas W. Lee,  
and Terence R. Mitchell  
University of Washington

Peter W. Hom  
Arizona State University

Rodger W. Griffeth  
Ohio University

We present the first major test of proximal withdrawal states theory (PWST; Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012). In addition, we develop and test new ideas to demonstrate how PWST improves our understanding and prediction of employee turnover. Across 2 studies, we corroborate that reluctant stayers (those who want to leave but have to stay) are similar to enthusiastic leavers (those who want to leave and can leave) in affective commitment, job satisfaction, and job embeddedness, and that reluctant leavers (those who want to stay but have to leave) are similar to enthusiastic stayers (those who want to stay and can stay) on these dimensions. We find that job satisfaction and job embeddedness more strongly influence the intent to leave and job search behavior for enthusiastic stayers and leavers than for reluctant stayers and leavers. More important, we show that for those experiencing low control over their preference for leaving or staying (i.e., reluctant stayers and leavers), traditional variables such as job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and intent to leave are poor predictors of their turnover behavior. We further demonstrate that focusing on enthusiastic stayers and leavers can significantly enhance the accuracy of job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and intent to leave for predicting actual employee turnover.

**Keywords:** turnover, proximal withdrawal state, job embeddedness, job satisfaction, job searching

Employee turnover has long fascinated organizational scholars and practitioners. Almost 100 years ago, Douglas (1918) wrote about the definition, cost, causes, and consequences of employee turnover in the *American Economic Review*. Since then, the number of scholarly articles on turnover has been estimated to be in the “thousands” (T. H. Lee, Gerhart, Weller, & Trevor, 2008). For employers, the cost of recruiting and training new employees can range from 90% to 200% of a former employee’s annual salary (D. G. Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010). Turnover can undermine team performance (Ton & Huckman, 2008), decrease customer service (Hancock, Allen, Bosco, McDaniel, & Pierce, 2013), and result in lost job knowledge (Trevor, Gerhart, & Boudreau, 1997). Beyond these costs, turnover can also lower profits (Heavey, Holwerda, & Hausknecht, 2013), sales (Kacmar, An-

drews, Van Rooy, Steilberg, & Cerrone, 2006), and likelihood of firm survival (Phillips, 2002), while increasing accident rates (Shaw, Gupta, & Delery, 2005). Thus, retaining employees remains vital.

Since 1958, March and Simon’s landmark theorizing on the psychological variables prompting employee turnover—namely, the perceived desirability and ease of movement (March & Simon, 1958)—has inspired virtually all conceptual models (and voluminous empirical research) that explain and predict quitting. Over the years, traditional and contemporary theorists universally rely on job satisfaction and perceived job alternatives to represent movement desirability and ease, respectively (e.g., Hom & Kinicki, 2001; Hulin, Roznowski, & Hachiya, 1985; T. W. Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Maertz & Campion, 2004; Mobley, 1977; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979; Price & Mueller, 1981, 1986). Narrative and meta-analytic reviews of the vast turnover literature (e.g., Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Hom, 2011; Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012; Joseph, Ng, Koh, & Ang, 2007; Maertz & Campion, 1998; Rubenstein, Eberly, Lee, & Mitchell, 2015; Steel & Lounsbury, 2009) reach three conclusions. First, research of job satisfaction dominates that of perceived job alternatives; second, satisfaction reliably but modestly predicts turnover; and third, satisfaction outperforms job alternatives in predicting turnover. To illustrate, Griffeth et al.’s (2000) meta-analysis reports a ratio of over 6 to 1 published articles on satisfaction compared with job alternatives and weighted mean correlations of  $-.22$  between satisfaction and turnover, and  $.12$  between per-

This article was published Online First August 8, 2016.

Junchao (Jason) Li, Thomas W. Lee, and Terence R. Mitchell, Department of Management & Organization, Foster School of Business, University of Washington; Peter W. Hom, Department of Management, Arizona State University; Rodger W. Griffeth, Department of Psychology, Ohio University.

We thank the Society for Human Resource Management for their generous support of our research.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Junchao (Jason) Li, Department of Management & Organization, Foster School of Business, University of Washington, Box 353200, Seattle, WA 98195-3226. E-mail: [junchli@uw.edu](mailto:junchli@uw.edu)

ceived alternatives and turnover. Despite March and Simon's (1958) profound influence, Maertz and Campion (1998) conclude that comprehensive formulations based on their model rarely explain more than 25% of the turnover variance. Subsequent reviews report similar findings (e.g., Griffeth et al., 2000).

Conventional academic wisdom implicitly assumes that dissatisfied employees leave, whereas satisfied employees stay. As suggested, however, empirical studies do not support a strong predictive validity for job satisfaction; instead, studies show that job satisfaction modestly predicts turnover. With such findings, modern perspectives moved away from the March and Simon (1958) tradition, notably, the unfolding model (T. W. Lee & Mitchell, 1994), motivational forces for leaving (Maertz & Campion, 2004), and job embeddedness (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001), by emphasizing other determinants of turnover (e.g., shocks, family pressures or duties) besides job attitudes. To shed light on why job attitudes modestly explain turnover, Hom et al. (2012) propose *proximal withdrawal states theory* (PWST), in which they highlight the role of employees' volitional control over leaving or staying in the turnover process, and identify how preferences and control result in *psychological states* for staying and leaving. In particular, Hom and colleagues observe that prevailing theories mainly focus on "enthusiastic stayers" (those who want to stay and can stay) and "enthusiastic leavers" (those who want to leave and can leave), but neglect "reluctant stayers" (those who want to leave but feel they must stay) and "reluctant leavers" (those who want to stay but feel they must leave). The theorized states of reluctant staying and leaving can clarify why dissatisfaction only marginally predicts turnover. PWST explains why reluctant stayers are often constrained in jobs they dislike (due to community embeddedness, scarce job alternatives, sacrifices, or contractual obligations), whereas reluctant leavers are often pressured to leave a job that they want to keep (due to anticipated plant closures or supervisory threats of dismissals; Campion, 1991; Trevor & Nyberg, 2008). Beyond these views, PWST holds that job attitudes inadequately foreshadow other forms of reluctant leaving (e.g., following spouses who relocate, quitting the workforce for full-time parenting). Although long deemed voluntary leaving, Hom et al. contend that these reluctant leavers' decisions are not fully autonomous, as some people exit to avoid guilt feelings or comply with normative pressures. PWST suggests that, by identifying and isolating reluctant leavers and stayers, job attitudes can better predict enthusiastic leavers and stayers' turnover.

To date, organizational scholars have yet to test the PWST thesis that proximal psychological states for staying or leaving are related to job attitudes and the prediction of turnover. Via two studies, this article offers two major contributions to the turnover literature. First, we provide the initial empirical tests of core and underlying theoretical propositions from PWST that the four proximal withdrawal states (PWSs) differentially relate to traditional and dominant predictors of turnover: job satisfaction, job embeddedness, affective commitment, and continuance commitment. More specifically, reluctant leavers and enthusiastic stayers have comparably high job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and affective commitment, whereas reluctant stayers and enthusiastic leavers have similarly low job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and affective commitment. Thus, the presence of reluctant leavers and reluctant

stayers can significantly attenuate the predictive validity of satisfaction, embeddedness, and commitment.

Second, we theoretically extend Hom et al.'s (2012) PWST by specifying how PWSs improve the prediction of turnover. Dominant perspectives on turnover generally envision leaving as a time-based process that follows a causal chain: distal influences (e.g., job and individual characteristics) → intermediate antecedents (e.g., job satisfaction, job embeddedness) → direct antecedents (job search behavior, intent to leave) → actual turnover (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008). We show that this conventional withdrawal sequence predicts turnover better (i.e., explaining more turnover variance) for people who have *high* control over their preference for leaving or staying (i.e., enthusiastic leavers and stayers). In contrast, such sequence poorly accounts for the turnover or retention of employees who have *low* control over their preference for staying/leaving (i.e., reluctant leavers and stayers). Accordingly, the predictive validity of job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and intent to leave on turnover can significantly increase by recognizing and separating reluctant leavers and stayers from enthusiastic leavers and stayers in statistical analyses.

## Theory and Hypotheses

### Theoretical Grounding and Hypothesis Development

By and large, turnover theorists assume that employees' preference for leaving is based primarily on their job satisfaction, which directly influences their intent to leave. Although liking or not liking one's job is clearly important, Hom and associates (2012) theorize that an assessment of control as well as an affective assessment of one's current employment situation must be jointly considered. They conceive "proximal withdrawal states" or mind-sets that exist before or concurrently with an intent to leave. By integrating desires to stay or leave with high or low control of that preference, four PWSs emerge: (a) enthusiastic stayers who want to stay and can stay, (b) reluctant stayers who want to leave but feel like they have to stay; (c) reluctant leavers who want to stay but feel they have to leave; and (d) enthusiastic leavers who want to leave and can leave. Note that the terms "leaver" and "stayer" reflect an employee's anticipation of his or her action (staying or leaving in the near future due to a combination of their preference and perceived control) as opposed to *actual* leaving and staying. In highlighting the role of perceived control in the turnover process, PWST does not suggest adding control over staying and control over leaving into traditional turnover models as continuous predictors or moderators. Instead, PWST advocates a categorical approach that encourages (a) a substantial shift from traditional prediction models to elucidate the unique mechanisms underlying reluctant leavers and reluctant stayers, and (b) a more person-centered approach to better capture the complex interactions among the various factors driving employees' preference of and control over leaving and staying (see more elaborations in the General Discussion section).

In the following sections, we elaborate on each PWS and conceptualize how employees in different states differ across important antecedents predicting turnover, including *job satisfaction, job*

embeddedness, affective commitment, continuance commitment, job search behavior, and intent to leave. Job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and affective commitment are more related to leaving or staying preferences. In contrast, continuance commitment is more related to perceived control over leaving and thus has a different pattern across PWSs from other variables.

**Enthusiastic stayers.** Enthusiastic stayers have high preference for staying in the organization and perceive high control over that preference. In other words, they want to stay and feel that they can stay. For many, they wish to spend their entire working life at this company because they find the organization is a good fit for them (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004). They are satisfied with their job, committed to the organization, and embedded. They fit with their job and community, have friends on the job and in the community, and would incur substantial sacrifices if they left (including social capital). These people conform the conventional belief that satisfied people stay in the organization as good employees, which has been empirically corroborated (T. W. Lee, Burch, & Mitchell, 2014).

**Reluctant leavers.** Reluctant leavers have high preference for staying but perceive low control over their staying. Although they want to stay as much as enthusiastic stayers, they anticipate that they will have to leave for a variety of reasons in the near future. Whereas abusive supervisors or bullying coworkers may signal and informally encourage employees to leave, reluctant leavers may also feel normative pressure from referent others outside workplaces. They may have to care for an aging family member or relocate to follow a domestic partner who moves for another job. We would note that these organizational and personal reasons of "having to leave" resemble the idea of "shocks" as particular, jarring events in the unfolding model (T. W. Lee & Mitchell, 1994). However, what drives reluctant leavers differ somewhat from the shocks described in the unfolding model that primarily initiate enthusiastic leaving (T. W. Lee & Mitchell, 1994). The shocks in the unfolding model constitute jarring events that "initiate the psychological decision processes involved in quitting a job," that is, making people *want to leave* (e.g., being bypassed for promotion, an abrupt conflict with a supervisor, an unsolicited job offer). These causes mostly shape one's preference for leaving. By comparison, the reasons for reluctant leaving often make employees feel that they *have to leave*, despite their satisfaction with their job and their attachment to the organization. These causes affect one's perceived control over leaving. That is, these people feel forced to leave for reasons *independent* of how they feel about their job (T. W. Lee, Mitchell, Wise, & Fireman, 1996). External social forces inducing employees to have to leave, such as family demands or obligations, are largely neglected by conventional turnover theories (Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010). Because they share an intrinsic desire to stay like enthusiastic stayers, employees having a "reluctant leaver" mind-set are likely satisfied with their job, committed to their organization, and embedded on- and off-the-job. Nonetheless, they expect to leave the organization soon. With such *positive* attitudes, reluctant leavers who do leave will weaken the often-theorized relationship between job attitudes and turnover because their attitudes resemble those of enthusiastic stayers.

**Enthusiastic leavers.** Enthusiastic leavers have high preference for leaving their organization and perceive high control over that preference. Thus, they are in the mind-set that they want to

leave and feel that they can leave when they want to. Enthusiastic leavers feel job dissatisfied, lack commitment to the company, and are less embedded in the job. They fit the classic definition of "voluntary leavers" in turnover theory. Job dissatisfaction or shocks (as construed in the unfolding model) can drive them to leave the organization with or without an alternative in hand (T. W. Lee & Mitchell, 1994).

**Reluctant stayers.** These people have high preferences for leaving but feel like they lack control over leaving. That is, they want to leave but feel like they must stay. Turnover and commitment scholars have long speculated about such employees, realizing that dissatisfied employees may stay in organizations because they do not have better (or any) alternatives and/or endure costly sacrifices upon leaving (e.g., Hom & Kinicki, 2001; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mitchell et al., 2001). Hom et al. (2012), however, suggest that this group bears closer scrutiny for several reasons. First, the *proportion of reluctant stayers swell during times of economic recessions* (Light, 2010), and *companies will keep marginal performers who cannot leave*. Second, reluctant stayers often appear as "bad apples" with *negative attitudes and actions* (Felps, Mitchell, & Byington, 2006). They feel trapped, disgruntled and blocked from leaving. As a result, they may constitute "dysfunctional retention" (Schiemann, 2009) and may bring considerable costs to employers. Third, factors that keep dissatisfied people at work are not yet comprehensively identified and integrated into turnover research. As noted, scholars historically focus on turnover costs (e.g., giving up job benefits) or inability to find comparable employment (Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Yet contemporary theorists are envisioning other barriers to leaving, such as forsaking desirable communities (Mitchell & Lee, 2001), family pressures to stay (Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010), or disruptions to spousal careers or children's education when moving for another job (Feldman, Ng, & Vogel, 2012). In general, reluctant stayers are misrepresented by the traditional notion that dissatisfaction leads to turnover. These people likely have low satisfaction, commitment and embeddedness. Yet, they stay until impediments to their leaving are removed. Based on the above reasoning, we offer the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* Enthusiastic stayers have higher (a) affective commitment, (b) job satisfaction, and (c) job embeddedness than enthusiastic leavers and reluctant stayers.

*Hypothesis 2:* Reluctant leavers have higher (a) affective commitment, (b) job satisfaction, and (c) job embeddedness than enthusiastic leavers and reluctant stayers.

*Hypothesis 3:* Enthusiastic stayers and reluctant leavers are similar (i.e., not significantly different) on (a) affective commitment, (b) job satisfaction, and (c) job embeddedness.

*Hypothesis 4:* Enthusiastic leavers and reluctant stayers are similar (i.e., not significantly different) on (a) affective commitment, (b) job satisfaction, and (c) job embeddedness.

<sup>1</sup> We did not include normative commitment in our discussion because we, as well as Hom et al. (2012), did not have a clear theoretical argument about how it will vary across different PWS. In addition, we did not include perceived job alternatives because the measure of continuance commitment highly overlaps with that of perceived alternatives.



We contend that continuance commitment exhibits a different pattern across the four states because it relates to employees' control over leaving rather than their preferences. Employees with high continuance commitment feel that they must remain in the organization due to turnover costs or scarce job prospects (Meyer & Allen, 1997), which are typical for reluctant stayers. Enthusiastic leavers should have low continuance commitment as they perceive fewer constraints (such as community or family embeddedness; Feldman et al., 2012; Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010) that can keep them in the organization when they decide to leave. In contrast, more uncertainty exists regarding the continuance commitment of enthusiastic stayers and reluctant leavers. Enthusiastic stayers are theorized as high in affective commitment, but not necessarily high in continuance commitment. Nonetheless, feeling that one "must stay" is not incompatible with being an enthusiastic stayer, as research on commitment profiles finds that employees having high affective, normative, and continuance commitment ("fully committed"; Meyer, Stanley, & Parfyonova, 2012) have low quit intentions. Reluctant leavers are attached to the organization because they prefer to stay. The feeling of "must stay" is not representative of them. On the other hand, reluctant stayers may have invested too much in the organization or lack a way out. Like "continuance commitment dominants" (Meyer et al., 2012), they may nonetheless boost their chances of leaving by lessening turnover costs (e.g., accumulate tenure for pension vesting) or obtain better employment (e.g., expanding the job searching). Therefore, we expect that enthusiastic stayers and reluctant leavers will have lower continuance commitment than reluctant stayers, but higher continuance commitment than enthusiastic leavers. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 5:* Reluctant stayers have the highest continuance commitment, enthusiastic stayers and reluctant leavers have a moderate level of continuance commitment, and enthusiastic leavers have the least.

Hypotheses 1 to 5 are deduced from PWST. In contrast, Hypotheses 6 through 12, discussed next, are put forth as theoretical extensions to PWST. First, job search behavior and intent to leave are posited to vary across the four PWSs. Second, the relationships among job satisfaction, job embeddedness, job search behavior, and intent to leave are theorized to differ for employees who have high versus low control over their leaving or staying (i.e., enthusiastic stayers and leavers vs. reluctant stayers and leavers). Third, and perhaps most important, *traditional* predictors such as job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and intent to leave are envisioned as weak predictors of turnover for those who have low control over their preference for leaving or staying (i.e., reluctant stayers and leavers). As a result, the predictive validity of job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and intent to leave on employee turnover can be greatly improved by excluding reluctant stayer and leavers from statistical analyses.

### Job Searching and Intent to Leave Across PWSs

Enthusiastic stayers want to stay in the organization and can stay. Therefore, they have little motivation to search for another job elsewhere and will seldom seek other jobs. In comparison, reluctant leavers are as attached to the organization and satisfied with their job as enthusiastic stayers, but feel forced to leave due

to work-related (e.g., informal encouragement from supervisor or coworkers) or personal reasons (e.g., family relocation, caring for disabled child). As they anticipate that they will have to leave the organization due to external reasons, they will often need a job when the forces pushing them out are activated. They will thus engage in job searching to secure another job when they have to leave the current organization. Hence, we expect that reluctant leavers engage in more job searching than enthusiastic stayers.

Enthusiastic leavers want to leave and feel that they can leave. Empirical research shows that voluntary leavers often exhibit job search behavior (Hom & Kinicki, 2001; Steel, 2002). Even if they have a job offer in hand, they often continue to search and leave when they decide they have a better alternative (T. W. Lee et al., 1996; T. W. Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, & Hill, 1999). Reluctant stayers want to leave the organization but are trapped by corporate and/or social forces. Some reluctant stayers have to stay because they do not have better alternatives. For these reluctant stayers, they will engage in job search behavior until they find a better alternative and leave. Other reluctant stayers may have to stay because of employment contracts, high costs of leaving at the present time (e.g., reimburse tuition assistance if prematurely exit), or family circumstances (e.g., children have yet to complete high school). These reluctant stayers likely engage in preparatory job searching in the earlier stage (e.g., prepare resumes, solicit job leads). Nonetheless, they will start active job searching when the time is ripe (i.e., when they expect that the barriers to leaving will soon be lifted). Taken together, we contend that reluctant stayers in general exhibit similar job search behavior as enthusiastic leavers and reluctant leavers. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 6:* Enthusiastic stayers conduct less job searching than reluctant stayers, reluctant leavers, and enthusiastic leavers; and reluctant stayers, reluctant leavers, and enthusiastic leavers display similar (i.e., not significantly different) job search behavior.

Turnover theorists often treat intent to leave as the most immediate antecedent to employee turnover (e.g., Hulin et al., 1985; Mobley, 1977). Attesting to its centrality in turnover research, numerous studies use intent to leave as a proxy for actual turnover (Jiang, Liu, McKay, Lee, & Mitchell, 2012). Intent to leave, however, differs from desire to leave (Steers & Mowday, 1981). The former not only captures the preference but also integrates the feasibility of that preference (Russell & Van Sell, 2012). For those who have high control over their preference (i.e., enthusiastic stayers and leavers), intent to leave is consistent with their desire to leave (Ajzen, 1991). Therefore, enthusiastic leavers should have a high intent to leave, whereas enthusiastic stayers should have a low intent to leave. Despite desiring to leave as much as enthusiastic leavers, reluctant stayers feel trapped by economic or legal constraints (e.g., lacking better alternatives or bound by contractual obligations; Mobley et al., 1979) or social pressure from family or partners (Feldman et al., 2012). As a result, their intent to leave in the near future is somewhat lowered until the impediment is removed. As Ajzen (1991) would put it, reluctant stayers cannot translate their positive attitudes toward the act of leaving into an intent to leave. On the other hand, although reluctant leavers desire to stay in the organization, organizational forces (e.g., informal supervisory pressures to leave) or family pressures

(e.g., spousal relocation or expatriation) to some extent raise their expectation that they will leave the organization in the near future. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 7:* Enthusiastic leavers hold the highest intent to leave, whereas enthusiastic stayers hold the lowest intent to leave, and reluctant leavers and reluctant stayers hold a medium level of intent to leave.

### The Relationships Between Job-Satisfaction/Embeddedness and Job-Searching/Intent-to-Leave

Traditional and many contemporary turnover models hold that job dissatisfaction often prompts a search for alternatives (T. W. Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Mobley, 1977; Steel, 2002). In contrast, those who feel satisfied with their job exhibit less job search behavior. We believe that this relationship holds well for those who have high control over their leaving or staying. As suggested, enthusiastic leavers have low job satisfaction, so they are motivated to search actively for better jobs, whereas enthusiastic stayers are satisfied with their jobs and engage in less job search behavior. Nonetheless, we contend that the relationship between job dissatisfaction and job searching declines for those who cannot realize their preferences. Reluctant stayers experience low satisfaction and are likely to engage in job searching to find a way out, but their job searching is delayed or less intense because they cannot accept a job offer until constraints on leaving are lifted (e.g., partner completes graduate school; Meyer et al., 2012). Reluctant leavers, however, engage in job searching not because of job dissatisfaction. In fact, they may be as satisfied with their jobs as enthusiastic stayers. Their job searching is driven by the fact that they are being forced out of their job because of organizational (e.g., supervisor forewarn them to “voluntary” leave before they are fired) or personal reasons (e.g., taking care of a sick family member, becoming full-time parent, spousal relocation) that necessitate a job searching. Therefore, the effect of job satisfaction on job searching will be substantially weaker among reluctant stayers and reluctant leavers. Similar arguments apply to the relationship between job embeddedness and job searching. Following past research (Jiang et al., 2012), we expect a strong, negative relationship between embeddedness and job searching for enthusiastic mind-sets, but expect this relationship will be reduced for reluctant mind-sets. Despite wanting to stay, reluctant leavers who are highly embedded in their job may thus actively pursue other employment because they face normative pressures to leave the organization (Maertz & Campion, 2004). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 8:* The relationship between (a) job satisfaction, (b) job embeddedness, and job search behavior are more negative among enthusiastic leavers and stayers than reluctant leavers and stayers.

Similarly, we expect that relationships between job satisfaction and job embeddedness with intent to leave will vary by whether employees have high or low control over their desire to stay or leave. As noted, accumulated research establishes that job satisfaction and job embeddedness are reliable predictors of intent to leave (Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992; Jiang et al., 2012). We argue that dissatisfaction prompts intent to leave,

while embeddedness lessens that intent for those having control over their preference (i.e., enthusiastic leavers and stayers). For reluctant leavers and reluctant stayers, the intent to leave is driven more by organizational or social forces that are beyond focal employees’ control than by their job satisfaction or job embeddedness. Accordingly, we put forth the following:

*Hypothesis 9:* The relationships between (a) job satisfaction, (b) job embeddedness, and intent to leave are more negative among enthusiastic leavers and stayers than reluctant leavers and stayers.

### Predicting Employee Turnover

We further investigate the implications of PWST for predicting actual turnover. Turnover researchers often use job dissatisfaction to predict employee leaving, job embeddedness to explain employees’ staying, and intent to leave as the most proximal antecedent of employee departures. We argue that the predictive validity of job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and intent to leave on turnover can vary considerably across employees having more control over their preference for staying/leaving and those having less control. Enthusiastic stayers and leavers perceive no constraints on their decision to stay or leave. Assuming that control perceptions are veridical (Ajzen, 1991), variables reflecting their attitudes toward leaving should thus more accurately predict their actual turnover (Trevor, 2001). For reluctant stayers and leavers, in contrast, external constraints work in the opposite direction as their attitudes toward staying or leaving, and oftentimes external forces trump their preferences. Those who want to leave are forced to stay (i.e., reluctant stayers) and those who want to stay are forced to leave (i.e., reluctant leavers). In this case, their attitudes and variables reflecting personal preferences (i.e., job satisfaction, job embeddedness and intent to leave) should less accurately predict their actual turnover. Their turnover largely depends on external factors that are unstable or outside their control (and often overlooked by conventional accounts of quits). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 10:* The effect of job satisfaction on employee turnover is more negative for enthusiastic leavers and stayers than for reluctant leavers and stayers.

*Hypothesis 11:* The effect of job embeddedness on employee turnover is more negative for enthusiastic leavers and stayers than for reluctant leavers and stayers.

*Hypothesis 12:* The effect of intent to leave on employee turnover is more positive for enthusiastic leavers and stayers than for reluctant leavers and stayers.

### Study Overview

Table 1 summarizes our hypotheses. We conduct two studies to test our hypotheses. As initial tests of Hypotheses 1 through 5, Study 1 adopted a retrospective design by asking participants to recall a time when they experienced one of the four PWs. They then reflected on their affective commitment, job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and continuance commitment at that time. Following the advice of Hom et al. (2012), this approach, albeit subject to self-confirming bias and recall inaccuracy, is useful in confirming

Table 1  
Summaries of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Affective commitment (H1a–H4a)	Job satisfaction (H1b–H4b)	Embeddedness (H1c–H4c)	Continuance commitment (H5)	Job search (H6)	Intent to leave (H7)	Satisfaction, embeddedness – Job search (H8)	Satisfaction, embeddedness – Intent to leave (H9)	Satisfaction – Turnover (H10)	Embeddedness – Turnover (H11)	Intent to leave – Turnover (H12)
Enthusiastic stayers	High	High	High	Medium	Low	Low	More negative	More negative	More negative	More negative	More positive
Enthusiastic leavers	Low	Low	Low	Low	High	High	Less negative	Less negative	Less negative	Less negative	Less positive
Reluctant stayers	Low	Low	Low to medium	High	High	Medium	Less negative	Less negative	Less negative	Less negative	Less positive
Reluctant leavers	High	High	Medium to high	Medium	High	Medium	Less negative	Less negative	Less negative	Less negative	Less positive

Note. H = Hypothesis.

the prevalence of reluctant leavers and stayers, as well as initially testing key relationships described in the PWST. This design is invaluable in originating and corroborating complex process models of attrition (cf. Kulik, Treuren, & Bordia, 2012; T. W. Lee et al., 1996; Maertz & Campion, 2004; Shipp, Holloway, Harris, & Rosen, 2014). For example, retrospective designs can more readily assess sudden and unplanned quits (e.g., onset of a terrible event such as being asked to conduct illegal acts or being reassigned to a detested boss; Path 2 of the unfolding model of turnover; T. W. Lee & Mitchell, 1994) than the “standard” design in turnover research (Steel, 2002). Study 2 adopted a standard predictive design in which employees identified their current PWS and reported their current affective commitment, job satisfaction, job embeddedness, continuance commitment, job search behavior, and intent to leave at Time 1. A follow-up survey was sent 9 months later to collect turnover criteria. The purpose of Study 2 was twofold. First, it partially offset possible recall biases in Study 1 and tested the robustness of Study 1 findings. Second, we tested Hypotheses 6 through 12 to provide empirical evidence on *how* PWST improves the prediction of employee turnover.

Study 1

Sample and Procedures

Using a Qualtrics panel, we sent an online survey to a broad sample of employees who work in America. Panel research companies require panelists to answer a series of profiling questions, including age, gender, ethnicity, household income, and so forth. Throughout the year, these panelists are incentivized to update this information. To ensure that panelists are who they say they are, companies adopt recruitment quality checks via double-opt-in/invite-only methods that verify their e-mail and physical address, digital fingerprinting and other third-party verification methods, and postparticipation quality checks such as historical behaviors to ensure they answer similar questions consistently. Panelists receive monetary rewards upon completing surveys.

Qualtrics ensured that our survey participants (a) were currently employed full-time, (b) were older than 25, (c) were high school graduates or above, and (d) had more than 5 years of working experience. At the beginning of the survey, participants were randomly asked about one of the following four situations: whether they had ever been in a situation “when you wanted to leave a job but could not due to various external forces” (reluctant stayer), “when you were in a job where you wanted to stay but had to leave” (reluctant leaver), “when you wanted to leave your job and you voluntarily did leave” (enthusiastic leaver), or “when you wanted to stay in a job in which you could stay and you did stay for at least a year” (enthusiastic stayer). In other words, participants were randomly presented with one of the four questions representing the four withdrawal states. If the participants reported “no” to the first situation presented to them, they were then presented with another randomly selected withdrawal state question. This line of inquiry continued until they said “yes” to one of the states or “no” to all four. If the participants reported “yes” to recalling a state, they were asked whether they could recall that situation and feelings clearly. Once they claimed that they had been in such a situation

and could clearly recall how they felt, they were asked more specific questions about that situation, assessing affective commitment, continuance commitment, job satisfaction, and job embeddedness (participants were reminded to answer all subsequent questions based on the situation they were recalling). Each participant only responded to one situation. If the participants could not recall one of the four situations clearly, they were dropped from the study.

## Measures

Standard measures from the existing literature were adopted to assess constructs of interests. Except for job embeddedness, all the constructs were measured using 5-point Likert scales that vary from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). *Affective commitment* was measured with eight items from N. J. Allen and Meyer (1990), and four were reverse-scored. An example item is "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization." Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .88. *Continuance commitment* was measured with eight items from Allen and Meyer. An example item is "It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right at that moment, even if I wanted to." Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .69. *Job satisfaction* was measured with Price and Mueller's (1986) three items. An example item is "All in all, I was satisfied with my job." Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .94. *Job embeddedness* was measured with a 21-item short-form scale by Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, and Tidd (2006). Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .91. We also gathered biographical data about participants. We assessed age by asking respondents to indicate the age range to which they belonged ("25–29," "30–34," . . . "65–69," or "70 or above"). Education was assessed based on three categories: high school graduate, bachelor's degree, or master's degree or above.

## Results

**Preliminary analysis.** Four hundred twenty-five employees completed our survey, but 14 participants were dropped because they could not recall any of the four conditions described. Another 34 respondents showed similar response patterns to standard and

reverse-coded items on affective commitment, continuance commitment, and job satisfaction. We thus examined their completion times. The average response time of these 34 respondents was about 5 min to finish the survey, whereas those responding appropriately to reverse-scored items took 10 or more minutes. We thus dropped the 34 respondents whose responses seemed careless and excessively fast. Among 377 valid participants, 110 recalled their prior experience as reluctant stayers (29.2%), 75 as reluctant leavers (19.9%), 106 as enthusiastic stayers (28.1%), and 86 as enthusiastic leavers (22.8%). The participants worked in a variety of occupations, including manufacturing, sales, clerk, service, and so forth. Although 71 participants (18.8%) held a master's or more advanced degree, 201 (53.3%) had a bachelor's degree, and 105 (27.9%) graduated from high school. Sixty-two percent were between the ages of 25 and 44. Pearson chi-square tests did not show significant distribution differences of PWSs across age or education level. Thus, concerns over sampling bias may be somewhat lessened. Variable means, standard deviations, and their correlations are presented in Table 2.

**Hypotheses testing.** A MANOVA showed that employees in the four withdrawal states differed significantly across our variables of interest (Wilks'  $\lambda = .54$ ;  $F = 21.49$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Follow-up ANOVAs on each dependent variable showed significant differences across the four psychological states. ANOVA results are shown in the left side of Table 3. There were significant differences across the four PWSs on affective commitment ( $F = 46.86$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = 27.4\%$ ), job satisfaction ( $F = 45.27$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = 27.0\%$ ), job embeddedness ( $F = 22.73$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = 15.5\%$ ), and continuance commitment ( $F = 31.96$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = 20.4\%$ ). ANOVAs assume homogeneity of variance, but this assumption was violated for affective commitment and job satisfaction. We thus conducted analyses of medians for these variables and also found similar significant attitudinal differences across the four states.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted, respectively, that enthusiastic stayers and reluctant leavers had more positive job attitudes than enthusiastic leavers and reluctant stayers. Scheffé post hoc comparisons (shown on the left-hand side of Table 4) revealed that reluctant leavers and enthusiastic stayers had significantly higher

Table 2  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Studies 1 and 2

Variables	Study 1 <sup>a</sup>			Study 2 <sup>b</sup>			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	Mean	SD	$\alpha$	Mean	SD	$\alpha$									
1. Affective commitment	3.13	.97	.88	3.49	1.03	.90	—	.06	.75	.58					
2. Continuance commitment	3.31	.72	.69	3.35	.85	.82	-.16	—	.00	.10					
3. Job satisfaction	3.49	1.22	.94	3.83	1.07	.92	.81	-.19	—	.62					
4. Job embeddedness <sup>c</sup>	0	.58	.87	0	.57	.88	.67	-.06	.65	—					
5. Preference of leaving				2.28	1.15	.96	-.83	.18	-.91	-.64	—				
6. Control over leaving				3.82	.86	.80	.22	-.25	.16	.24	-.16	—			
7. Control over staying				3.79	.90	.76	.26	-.24	.20	.28	-.19	.78	—		
8. Job search behavior				1.84	.90	.96	-.37	.15	-.36	-.18	.43	-.19	-.19	—	
9. Intent to leave				1.97	1.18	—	-.55	.03	-.62	-.39	.67	-.11	-.12	.62	—
10. Turnover <sup>d</sup>				.05	.23	—	-.08	-.01	-.17	-.08	.15	-.02	-.07	.10	.20

Note. Correlations for Study 1 are in the upper right of the correlation table, and correlations for Study 2 are in the lower left. Correlation is significant at the .05 level when the absolute value is larger than .10 (Study 1) or .09 (Study 2).

<sup>a</sup>  $n = 377$ . <sup>b</sup>  $n = 751$ . <sup>c</sup> Job embeddedness is standardized to deal with different metrics in measurement; therefore, its mean is 0. <sup>d</sup> Turnover = 1, no turnover = 0;  $n = 480$ .



Table 3  
One-Way ANOVA of Studies 1 and 2

Variable	Study 1					Study 2					
	<i>p</i>	Sig.	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	Homogeneity variance test	Median test	<i>p</i>	Sig.	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	Homogeneity variance test	Median test	
1. Affective commitment	.00	**	27.4%	.04	*	.00	.00	**	43.3%	.50	<i>ns</i>
2. Continuance commitment	.00	**	20.4%	.42	<i>ns</i>	.00	.00	**	11.9%	.00	**
3. Job satisfaction	.00	**	27.0%	.00	**	.00	.00	**	58.1%	.00	**
4. Job embeddedness	.00	**	15.5%	.12	<i>ns</i>	.00	.00	**	24.7%	.71	<i>ns</i>
5. Preference of leaving						.00	.00	**	67.4%	.00	**
6. Job search behavior						.00	.00	**	20.5%	.00	**
7. Intent to leave						.00	.00	**	47.4%	.00	**

Note. Sig. = significance; *ns* = not significant.

\* *p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .01.

(a) affective commitment, (b) job satisfaction, and (c) job embeddedness than reluctant stayers and enthusiastic leavers. Hypotheses 1 and 2 are supported.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 hold, respectively, that enthusiastic stayers and reluctant leavers have similar job attitudes, and that enthusiastic leavers and reluctant stayers also share similar attitudes. We tested these two hypotheses with Scheffé post hoc comparisons. We also conducted a series of power analyses to show that insignificant findings between groups (e.g., enthusiastic stayers and reluctant leavers) were not a result of low statistical power.<sup>2</sup> To provide additional evidence on the null hypotheses, we adopted the Bayesian approach and used the BayesFactor package (Morey & Rouder, 2015) in R to calculate the Bayes factor (BF), which is a ratio generated from dividing the odds of having the observed standardized effect size under the alternative hypothesis by the odds of having the observed effect size under the null hypothesis (i.e., equal means in two groups).<sup>3</sup>

Results show that reluctant leavers and enthusiastic stayers were not significantly different on (a) affective commitment (Standard Error (*SE*) = .13, *p* = .67, Cohen's *d* = .19, *N*<sub>power=.80</sub> = 600, BF = .37), (b) job satisfaction (*SE* = .16, *p* = .99, Cohen's *d* = .03, *N*<sub>power=.80</sub> = 21,014, BF = .17), and (c) job embeddedness (*SE* = .08, *p* = .30, Cohen's *d* = .32, Power = .81, BF = 1.27). Similarly, reluctant stayers and enthusiastic leavers were not significantly different on (a) affective commitment (*SE* = .12, *p* = .94, Cohen's *d* = .09, *N*<sub>power=.80</sub> = 3,320, BF = .19), (b) job satisfaction (*SE* = .15, *p* = .99, Cohen's *d* = .03, *N*<sub>power=.80</sub> = 18,690, BF = .16), and (c) job embeddedness (*SE* = .08, *p* = .38, Cohen's *d* = .23, Power = .58, BF = .54).<sup>4</sup> Hence, Hypotheses 3 and 4 are supported.

To aid interpretation, we plotted the differences among employees in the four states on affective commitment (Figure 1a), job satisfaction (Figure 1b), and job embeddedness (Figure 1c). Furthermore, reluctant stayers reported the highest continuance commitment (*M* = 3.68, *SD* = .63), followed by enthusiastic stayers (*M* = 3.44, *SD* = .62), reluctant leavers (*M* = 3.14, *SD* = .69), and enthusiastic leavers (*M* = 2.81, *SD* = .68), in order (Figure 1d). All differences between any two states on continuance commitment were significant at the .05 level. Hypothesis 5 is supported.

**Supplementary analysis on stayers and leavers.** Prevailing turnover perspectives predict that those who leave should have lower satisfaction, commitment, and embeddedness than those who stay. Our results indicate, however, that the presence of

reluctant stayers and leavers can weaken this prediction. To demonstrate this point further, we conducted a series of *t* tests to compare stayers (the combination of enthusiastic stayers and reluctant stayers) and leavers (the combination of enthusiastic leavers and reluctant leaver) on affective commitment, job satisfaction, and job embeddedness. As is shown in the left-hand side of Table 5, differences between stayers and leavers for affective commitment (*SE* = .10, *p* = .56, Cohen's *d* = .06, *N*<sub>power=.80</sub> = 6,524, BF = .14) and job satisfaction (*SE* = .13, *p* = .85, Cohen's *d* = .02, *N*<sub>power=.80</sub> = 70,338, BF = .12) were not significant. In comparison, *enthusiastic stayers* had significantly higher affective commitment and job satisfaction than *enthusiastic leavers* (see Table 4). We do not argue that variables such as job satisfaction and affective commitment cannot predict staying and leaving, but that their predictive efficacy can be greatly undermined with inclusion of reluctant leavers and stayers in statistical analyses. As the proportion of reluctant leavers and stayers goes up in a given sample, predictive power of traditional antecedents, such as job satisfaction and affective commitment, should decline.

## Discussion

Study 1 provides initial promising evidence for PWST and Hypotheses 1 through 5. Specifically, reluctant leavers and enthusiastic stayers had higher affective commitment, job satisfaction, and job embeddedness than reluctant stayers and enthusiastic

<sup>2</sup> Note that "when conducting power analyses as part of testing the null hypothesis, it is important to determine when an effect is large enough to be considered nontrivial" (Cashen & Geiger, 2004, p. 156), because an extremely small effect size will require an impractically large sample size if a decent level of power is desired (Cohen, 1977, 1992). As the lower limit of small effect size set by Cohen (*d* = .20 for comparing independent means) is widely accepted as the line of trivial versus nontrivial effect (e.g., Cashen & Geiger, 2004; Lane, Cannella, & Lubatkin, 1998), we report the power analysis only when the Cohen's *d* is higher than .20. For those effects with Cohen's *d* lower than .20, we calculate the sample size needed in order to achieve a power of .80, denoted as *N*<sub>power=.80</sub>.

<sup>3</sup> BF < 1 indicates that the null hypothesis is favored over alternative hypothesis. According to Kass and Raftery (1995), when 1 < BF < 3, the evidence for the alternative hypothesis is not worth more than a bare mention; when 3 < BF < 20, there is a positive but moderate evidence in favor of the alternative hypothesis; only when BF > 20 can one claim strong evidence for the alternative hypothesis.

<sup>4</sup> The relatively low power for this comparison is mostly due to the small effect size, as it is only slightly above the cutoff point of .20 (Cohen, 1992).

Table 4

*Scheffe Post Hoc Analysis of Studies 1 and 2*

Variable	Study 1				Study 2					
	Comparison between states		Sig.	Hyp.	Comparison between states		Sig.	Hyp. <sup>a</sup>		
1. Affective commitment	ES (3.72)	>	RS (2.61)	**	H1a (+)	ES (3.95)	>	RS (2.40)	**	H1a (+)
		>	EL (2.69)	**	H1a (+)		>	EL (2.32)	**	H1a (+)
		~	RL (3.56)	ns	H3a (+)		>	RL (3.53)	**	H3a (0)
	RL (3.56)	>	RS (2.61)	**	H2a (+)	RL (3.53)	>	RS (2.40)	**	H2a (+)
		>	EL (2.69)	**	H2a (+)		>	EL (2.32)	**	H2a (+)
	EL (2.69)	~	RS (2.61)	ns	H4a (+)	EL (2.32)	~	RS (2.40)	ns	H4a (+)
2. Job satisfaction	ES (4.15)	>	RS (2.86)	**	H1b (+)	ES (4.39)	>	RS (2.46)	**	H1b (+)
		>	EL (2.91)	**	H1b (+)		>	EL (2.59)	**	H1b (+)
		~	RL (4.12)	ns	H3b (+)		>	RL (3.80)	**	H3b (0)
	RL (4.12)	>	RS (2.86)	**	H2b (+)	RL (3.80)	>	RS (2.46)	**	H2b (+)
		>	EL (2.91)	**	H2b (+)		>	EL (2.59)	**	H2b (+)
	EL (2.91)	~	RS (2.86)	ns	H4b (+)	EL (2.59)	~	RS (2.46)	ns	H4b (+)
3. Job embeddedness	ES (.29)	>	RS (-.15)	**	H1c (+)	ES (.20)	>	RS (-.41)	**	H1c (+)
		>	EL (-.29)	**	H1c (+)		>	EL (-.58)	**	H1c (+)
		~	RL (.14)	ns	H3c (+)		>	RL (-.02)	**	H3c (0)
	RL (.14)	>	RS (-.15)	**	H2c (+)	RL (-.02)	>	RS (-.41)	**	H2c (+)
		>	EL (-.29)	**	H2c (+)		>	EL (-.58)	**	H2c (+)
	EL (-.29)	~	RS (-.15)	ns	H4c (+)	EL (-.58)	~	RS (-.41)	ns	H4c (+)
4. Continuance commitment	ES (3.44)	<	RS (3.68)	*	H5 (+)	ES (3.21)	<	RS (3.86)	**	H5 (+)
		>	EL (2.81)	**	H5 (+)		>	EL (2.82)	*	H5 (+)
		>	RL (3.14)	*	H5 (+)		<	RL (3.57)	**	H5 (+)
	RL (3.14)	<	RS (3.68)	**	H5 (+)	RL (3.57)	~	RS (3.86)	ns	H5 (0)
		>	EL (2.81)	*	H5 (+)		>	EL (2.82)	**	H5 (+)
	EL (2.81)	<	RS (3.68)	**	H5 (+)	EL (2.82)	<	RS (3.86)	**	H5 (+)
5. Job search behavior	ES (1.52)	<	RS (2.24)	**	H6 (+)	ES (1.52)	<	RS (2.24)	**	H6 (+)
		<	EL (2.52)	**	H6 (+)		<	EL (2.52)	**	H6 (+)
		<	RL (2.41)	**	H6 (+)		<	RL (2.41)	**	H6 (+)
	RL (2.41)	~	RS (2.24)	ns	H6 (+)	RL (2.41)	~	RS (2.24)	ns	H6 (+)
		~	EL (2.52)	ns	H6 (+)		~	EL (2.52)	ns	H6 (+)
	EL (2.52)	~	RS (2.24)	ns	H6 (+)	EL (2.52)	~	RS (2.24)	ns	H6 (+)
6. Intent to leave	ES (1.39)	<	RS (2.69)	**	H7 (+)	ES (1.39)	<	RS (2.69)	**	H7 (+)
		<	EL (4.00)	**	H7 (+)		<	EL (4.00)	**	H7 (+)
		<	RL (2.67)	**	H7 (+)		<	RL (2.67)	**	H7 (+)
	RL (2.67)	~	RS (2.69)	ns	H7 (+)	RL (2.67)	~	RS (2.69)	ns	H7 (+)
		<	EL (4.00)	**	H7 (+)		<	EL (4.00)	**	H7 (+)
	EL (4.00)	>	RS (2.69)	**	H7 (+)	EL (4.00)	>	RS (2.69)	**	H7 (+)

Note. Means are provided in parentheses. Sig. = significance; Hyp. = hypothesis; RS = reluctant stayer; RL = reluctant leaver; ES = enthusiastic stayer; EL = enthusiastic leaver; *ns* = not significant.

<sup>a</sup> Hypotheses supported (+); hypothesis not supported (0).

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

leavers (Hypotheses 1 and 2). Reluctant leavers were also similar to enthusiastic stayers in having high affective commitment, job satisfaction, and job embeddedness (Hypothesis 3), and reluctant stayers were similar to enthusiastic leavers in having low affective commitment, job satisfaction, and job embeddedness (Hypothesis 4). Additionally, the pattern of continuance commitment across the four PWSs was also corroborated.

Existing evidence suggests that the probability of recall bias for enthusiastic and reluctant leavers may be less of a concern. For instance, research suggests that events like leaving a job can be accurately remembered (Wheeler, Stuss, & Tulving, 1997). Leaving a job is often a major and vivid personal event. As such, the memory of that departure should be stored in episodic memory, which holds items that are more accurately remembered. Also, research on self-based referencing structures suggests that such memories may be accurate and increase in accuracy over time (Symons & Johnson, 1997). When the decision to leave is voluntary and self-based, the memory of the event is more accurate.

Finally, the postevent recall research design has been shown as unbiased and a viable research strategy (Miller, Cardinal, & Glick, 1997). Nonetheless, Study 2 asked participants to reflect on their *current* job, identify their PWS, and report their job attitudes. More important, Study 2 tested specific hypotheses on how PWST can enhance predictions of job search behavior, intent to leave, and actual turnover (Hypotheses 6 through 12).

## Study 2

### Sample and Procedure

Study 2 adopted a predictive design, with predictors collected in an initial survey and turnover information collected in a follow-up survey 9 months later. We recruited our sample using a Qualtrics panel. Again, Qualtrics ensures a relatively random sample that is demographically similar to Study 1, but participants in Study 2 did not overlap with Study 1. In the initial survey, we asked partici-

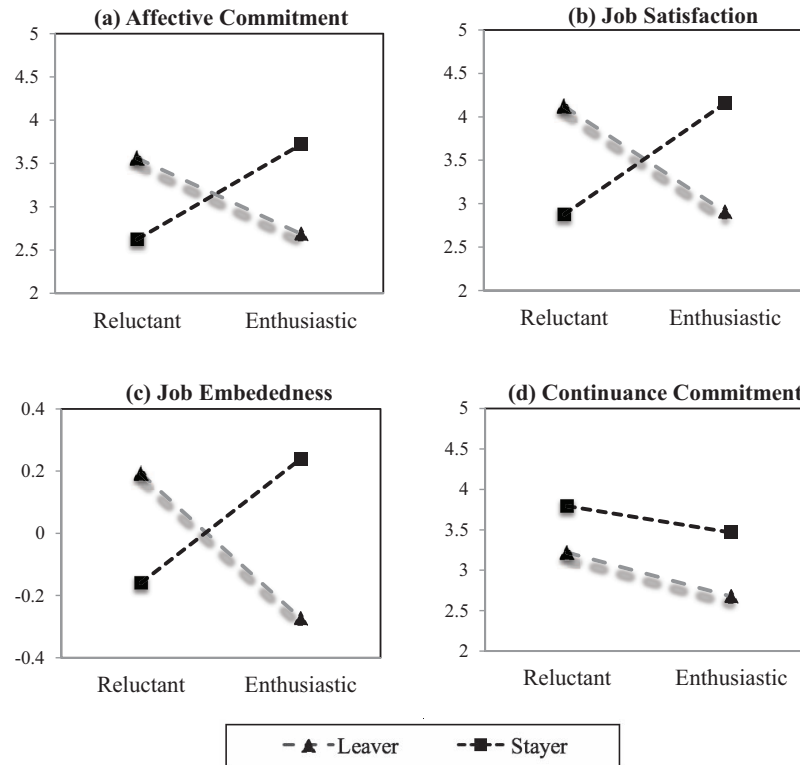


Figure 1. Attitudes and embeddedness across proximal withdrawal states (Study 1).

participants to identify which state best reflects their feeling about their current job (“I WANT TO LEAVE this organization but I feel like I HAVE TO STAY,” “I WANT TO STAY in this organization but I may HAVE TO LEAVE,” “I WANT TO STAY in this organization and I CAN STAY if I want to,” or “I WANT TO LEAVE this organization and I CAN LEAVE if I want to”). Because the self-identified PWS is critical to our study, we reminded participants to give serious thought about the state-identifying question. After they indicated their choice, we asked again whether they were positive about it. If not, they were redirected to the earlier question on psychological states and had another opportunity to make a choice. Twenty-four of 809 participants were uncertain

about their first choice and made a second choice. Next, participants answered a set of questions specific to their self-identified PWS and a common set of questions about their preference of leaving or staying, control over leaving or staying, job satisfaction, affective commitment, continuance commitment, job embeddedness, job search behavior, and intent to leave. The follow-up survey 9 months later asked participants whether they remain employed in the same organization they were in when they were first surveyed. If the participants indicated “no,” they were directed to the questions about their turnover, including (a) when they left, (b) why they left, and (c) whether or not the departure was voluntary (i.e., terminated by the organization or not).

Table 5  
Results of *T* Test Between Stayers and Leavers

Variable	Study 1					Study 2				
	<i>p</i>	Sig.	Homogeneity variance test	Median test sig.		<i>p</i>	Sig.	Homogeneity variance test	Median test sig.	
1. Affective commitment	.40	<i>ns</i>	.72	<i>ns</i>		.00	**	.62	<i>ns</i>	
2. Job satisfaction	.67	<i>ns</i>	.03	*	<i>ns</i>	.00	**	.55	<i>ns</i>	
3. Job embeddedness	.01	**	.25	<i>ns</i>		.00	**	.59	<i>ns</i>	
4. Continuance commitment	.00	**	.19	<i>ns</i>		.33	<i>ns</i>	.79	<i>ns</i>	
5. Job search behavior						.00	**	.00	**	**
6. Intent to leave						.00	**	.00	**	**

Note. The stayer group and leaver group may look similar (Study 1) because reluctant stayers “contaminated” the stayer group. Note that in Study 2, the stayer group is dominated by enthusiastic stayers (76.5%), compared with 49% in Study 1. Therefore, stayer group in Study 2 is more representative of enthusiastic stayers, and thus we find significant differences between the stayer group and leaver group in Study 2. Sig. = significance; *ns* = not significant.

\* *p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .01.

Eight hundred nine full-time U.S.-based employees from various occupations completed the first survey. This survey featured several quality-control questions that directed participants to choose a specific answer (e.g., "Please choose 'strongly disagree' for this question"). If they failed to choose that answer, they were removed from further analysis. As in Study 1, we also omitted respondents who gave unreasonable answers on reverse-score items or finished the survey too soon. As a result, we excluded 44 respondents from further analysis.

In addition, we examined participants' answers on questions about their respective withdrawal state. Disagreement with these items indicates that the self-identified state is not truly reflecting their current situation at work. Thirty-three respondents were excluded from further analysis due to their low score on these state-specific items (lower than 3 with a 5-point Likert scale). We believe that the self-identified states for these excluded participants did not truly reflect their current situation at work because of a lack of attention to the state-identifying question. Our final sample had 732 respondents, including 455 enthusiastic stayers (62.2%), 140 reluctant stayers (19.1%), 85 reluctant leavers (11.6%), and 52 enthusiastic leavers (7.1%). Among the 732 respondents, 480 completed our follow-up survey 9 months later (completion rate 65.6%). We distributed Survey 1 in October 2013, with an unemployment rate of 7.2%, and Survey 2 in July 2014, with an unemployment rate of 6.2%.

Among our 732 valid respondents, 218 (29.8%) were high school graduates, 375 (51.2%) held a bachelor's degree, and 139 (19%) held a master's degree or higher degree; 28.0% were 25 to 34 years old, 28.5% were in the 35 to 44 range, and 24.6% were in the 45 to 54 range. Two hundred sixty-five (36.2%) participants worked in their current organization for more than 10 years, and the rest fell fairly evenly into organization tenures from 1 to 10 years. Similar to Study 1, we examined whether age, education, or tenure in their current organization were related to participants' self-identified states. We did not find significant differences of the distribution of PWSs across education,  $\chi^2(27) = 33.42$ , *ns*, or tenure in their current organization,  $\chi^2(6) = 3.36$ , *ns*. However, we did find that employees older than 65 were more likely to be enthusiastic stayers. Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among Study 2 variables.

## Measures

In addition to the variables in Study 1, Study 2 extended our variables of interest to include a PWS scale, preference for leaving, control over leaving, control over staying, job search behavior, intent to leave, and actual turnover. The new variables were measured with the same rating scales as in Study 1. Table 2 reports coefficient alphas for all measures.

As a validity check, we added several items to corroborate participants' self-identified psychological withdrawal state.<sup>5</sup> Respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements with 5-point Likert scales. As reported earlier, 33 people were dropped as a result of this analysis. *Preference for leaving* was assessed with six items adapted from Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) theory of reasoned action to assess attitude toward the act of leaving (cf. Hom & Hulin, 1981). An example item is "I would prefer to work somewhere else rather than this organization." Cronbach's al-

pha for this measure was .94. *Perceived control over staying* and *perceived control over leaving* were each measured with three items based on Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (van Breukelen, Van der Vlist, & Steensma, 2004). The three items of perceived control over staying were "It is mostly up to me whether or not I am able to stay in my current organization," "I have a great deal of control over being able to stay in my current job," and "It is NOT up to me whether I am able to stay in my job" (reverse). Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .80. The three items of perceived control over leaving were "It is mostly up to me whether or not I am able to leave my current organization," "I have a great deal of control over being able to leave my current job," and "It is NOT up to me whether I am able to leave my job" (reverse). Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .76. Our measure of perceived control captures the general feeling of control over staying or leaving, as opposed to the specific reasons that make an employee have to leave (e.g., spousal relocation) or have to stay (e.g., lack of alternatives). *Job search behavior* is measured with 12 items from Blau (1994). Participants were asked to indicate how often they engaged in job search behaviors, including preparing a resume, talking with friends or relatives about possible job leads, listing oneself as a job applicant on websites, and so forth. Participants responded on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very frequently*). Coefficient alpha for job search behavior is .96. *Intent to leave* was measured with one item: "I intend to quit my job within the next six months" (Hom & Griffeth, 1995). *Turnover* was measured by a yes-no question that asked if they were currently employed at the same job that they had 9 months earlier. If they said "no," they were further asked whether their leaving was voluntary or involuntary (i.e., formally terminated by their company).

## Results

**Validity checks of the self-identified PWSs.** To provide more evidence on the validity of the self-identifying state, we conducted additional analyses. A one-way ANOVA (see Table 3) and Scheffé post hoc analysis supported our prediction that reluctant leavers ( $M = 2.24$ ,  $SD = .84$ ) and enthusiastic stayers ( $M = 1.64$ ,  $SD = .60$ ) had lower preference for leaving than reluctant stayers ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = .68$ ) and enthusiastic leavers ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = .71$ ). Also as expected, enthusiastic leavers ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD =$

<sup>5</sup> Items for reluctant stayers are: "I will remain at this organization as long as needed, but I want to leave," "I feel that my work does not utilize my full abilities, but I have to stay," "My organization's value clash with my own, but I have to stay," "I want to leave but it would be difficult to leave this organization," and "I want to leave but cannot leave my job currently." Items for enthusiastic stayers are: "I want to stay in this organization until retirement, and I can stay," "I am certain the company wants me to stay in the foreseeable future and I would like to stay," "I want to stay in this organization and I can stay," and "I like my job and I can stay, even though I know I could do better." Items for reluctant leavers are: "If I leave this organization in the next six months, it will be mostly due to forces outside of my control, but I want to stay" and "I do not want to leave, but I feel I may have to." Items for enthusiastic leavers are: "I want to leave and there is nothing that can make me stay," "I want to leave this company in the next six months and it will be mostly my decision," "I plan to leave this firm in the next six months and there is nothing they can reasonably do to change my mind," and "I want to leave this organization and I can leave."



.68) had higher perceived control over leaving than reluctant stayers ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = .88$ ),  $F(1, 189) = 15.15$ ,  $p < .01$ , and enthusiastic stayers ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) had higher perceived control over staying than reluctant leavers ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ),  $F(1, 534) = 57.74$ ,  $p < .01$ .

**Commitment, satisfaction, and embeddedness across the PWSs.** These analyses sought to replicate our findings in Study 1 and to test Hypothesis 1 through 5. Again, a MANOVA showed that employees in the four withdrawal states differed significantly across the variables of interest (Wilks'  $\lambda = .371$ ;  $F = 72.67$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Next, one-way ANOVAs for each variable replicated the results of differences across the four PWSs. ANOVA results for Study 2 are shown in the right side of Table 3 and corroborate the significant differences across the four states on affective commitment ( $F = 185.55$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = 43.3\%$ ), job satisfaction ( $F = 336.95$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = 58.1\%$ ), job embeddedness ( $F = 79.04$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = 24.7\%$ ), and continuance commitment ( $F = 32.75$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = 11.9\%$ ). We again tested the assumption of homogeneity of variance. The assumption was violated for continuance commitment and job satisfaction. To overcome this violation, analyses of medians corroborated the significant differences across the four PWSs.

Scheffé post hoc comparisons (right-hand side of Table 4) and Figure 2 (a to d) detail how the four proximal states differed from one another on job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and commitment. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were again supported. Nonetheless, enthusiastic stayers had significantly higher affective commitment, job satisfaction, and job embeddedness than reluctant leavers, which conflicts with the Study 1 results and Hypothesis 3, which holds that enthusiastic stayers and reluctant leavers are similar to each other (i.e., not significantly different) on these variables. In contrast, reluctant stayers were similar to enthusiastic leavers on affective commitment ( $SE = .13$ ,  $p = .95$ , Cohen's  $d = .09$ ,  $N_{\text{power}=.80} = 2,732$ ,  $BF = .21$ ), job satisfaction ( $SE = .11$ ,  $p =$

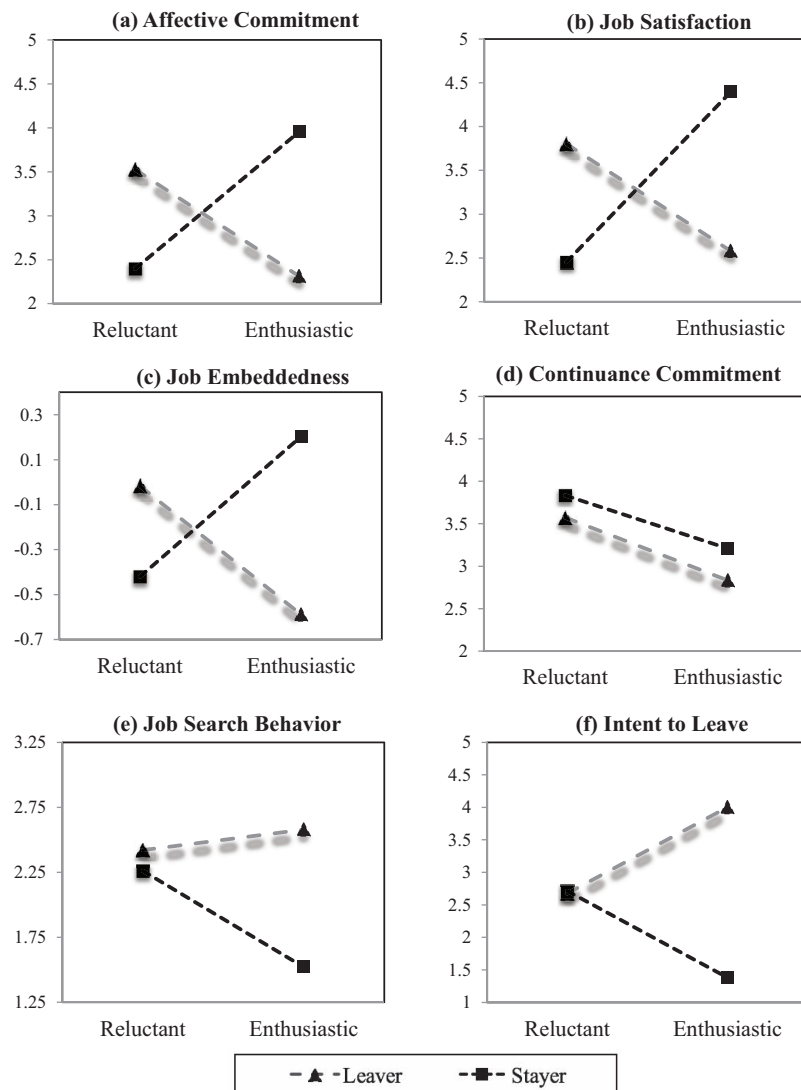


Figure 2. Attitudes, embeddedness, job search behavior, and intent to leave across proximal withdrawal states (Study 2).

.72, Cohen's  $d = .13$ ,  $N_{\text{power}=.80} = 1,190$ ,  $\text{BF} = .26$ ), and job embeddedness ( $SE = .08$ ,  $p = .25$ , Cohen's  $d = .27$ ,  $\text{Power} = .91$ ,  $\text{BF} = .89$ ). Hypothesis 4 is thus affirmed.

The result for continuance commitment differed somewhat from Study 1. Reluctant stayers ( $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) and reluctant leavers ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) had similarly high continuance commitment (whereas we predicted that reluctant stayers should have higher continuance commitment than reluctant leavers;  $SE = .11$ ,  $p = .07$ , Cohen's  $d = .43$ ,  $\text{power} = .99$ ,  $\text{BF} = 16.37$ ), followed by enthusiastic stayers ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = .85$ ) and enthusiastic leavers ( $M = 2.82$ ,  $SD = .93$ ). These results generally accord with Hypothesis 5.

**Job search behavior and intent to leave across the PWS.** A one-way ANOVA (see Table 3) indicated significant differences in job search behavior across the four PWSs ( $F = 62.61$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = 20.5\%$ ). Table 4 and Figure 2e disclose the details of these differences. Enthusiastic stayers reported less job searching, whereas employees in the other three states reported similar (i.e., not significantly different), but more, job searching (reluctant stayer vs. reluctant leaver:  $SE = .11$ ,  $p = .49$ , Cohen's  $d = .18$ ,  $N_{\text{power}=.80} = 732$ ,  $\text{BF} = .34$ ; reluctant stayer vs. enthusiastic leaver:  $SE = .13$ ,  $p = .20$ , Cohen's  $d = .27$ ,  $\text{power} = .93$ ,  $\text{BF} = .88$ ; reluctant leaver vs. enthusiastic leaver:  $SE = .14$ ,  $p = .89$ , Cohen's  $d = .12$ ,  $N_{\text{power}=.80} = 1,904$ ,  $\text{BF} = .23$ ). Hypothesis 6 is supported.

The four PWSs accounted for significant variance in employees' intent to leave ( $F = 218.07$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = 47.4\%$ ). Figure 2f and Scheffé post hoc analysis (see Table 4) show that although enthusiastic leavers had the highest intent to leave and enthusiastic stayers had the lowest, reluctant stayers and leavers had medium and similar ( $SE = .12$ ,  $p = .99$ , Cohen's  $d = .02$ ,  $N_{\text{power}=.80} = 71,548$ ,  $\text{BF} = .15$ ) levels of intent to leave. Hypothesis 7 is supported.

**Supplementary analysis across stayers and leavers.** We again test the differences between stayers (combining enthusiastic stayers and reluctant stayers) and leavers (combining enthusiastic leavers and reluctant leavers). Study 1 found no significant differences between stayers (51% of reluctant stayers and 49% of enthusiastic stayers) and leavers (46.3% reluctant leavers and 53.7% enthusiastic leavers) on affective commitment, job satisfaction, and job embeddedness. In contrast, stayers in Study 2 had significantly higher affective commitment, job satisfaction, and job embeddedness than leavers, whereas leavers had higher job searching and intent to leave than stayers (right side of Table 5). We attribute these inconsistent findings across studies to their differing compositions of stayers. In Study 2, enthusiastic stayers dominated the stayer group, with 76.5% of the sample, whereas in Study 1, the stayer group was evenly split into enthusiastic stayers and reluctant stayers. We contend that whereas reluctant stayers drive down the average of positive attitudes of the stayer group, reluctant leavers drive up the average of positive attitudes of the leaver group. Therefore, the presence of many reluctant leavers and reluctant stayers reduces the overall gap between stayers and leavers. As the proportion of reluctant leavers and reluctant stayers goes up, differences between stayers and leavers become smaller. Therefore, we are not surprised to find that differences between the stayer group and the leaver group were larger in Study 2 than in Study 1.

**Relationships between job-satisfaction/embeddedness and job-searching/intent-to-leave.** To Test Hypotheses 8 and 9, we examine how job satisfaction and job embeddedness were corre-

lated with job search behavior and intent to leave in our reluctant group (comprising both reluctant stayers and reluctant leavers) and enthusiastic group (including enthusiastic stayers and enthusiastic leavers). Correlations between job satisfaction and job search behavior differed between the enthusiastic groups ( $r = -.38$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and the reluctant groups ( $r = -.01$ ,  $ns$ ). Using Fisher's  $r$ -to- $z$  transformation and the calculation tool from Preacher (2002), we found that the correlation was significantly more negative for the enthusiastic groups than for reluctant groups ( $z = 4.96$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Similarly, the correlation between job embeddedness and job search behavior was significantly more negative ( $z = 4.43$ ,  $p < .01$ ) for the enthusiastic groups ( $r = -.20$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than for the reluctant groups ( $r = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ; note that this correlation is in the opposite direction). Thus, H8 is supported. The correlation between job satisfaction and intent to leave was significantly more negative ( $z = 8.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ) for the enthusiastic groups ( $r = -.71$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than for the reluctant groups ( $r = -.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The correlation between job embeddedness and intent to leave was also significantly more negative ( $z = 6.42$ ,  $p < .01$ ) for the enthusiastic groups ( $r = -.47$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than for the reluctant groups ( $r = -.06$ ,  $ns$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 9 was supported. These results indicate that the effects of job satisfaction and job embeddedness on intent to leave and job search behavior were stronger for enthusiastic stayers and leavers than for reluctant stayers and leavers.

**Validity of job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and intent to leave for predicting turnover.** As noted, 480 of 732 participants completed our follow-up survey 9 months later and provided the turnover criterion. We conducted chi-squares analysis, ANOVAs, and multiple logistic regressions to assess nonresponse bias in the follow-up survey. We found that the PWS of participants in the initial survey was unrelated to whether or not they responded to the follow-up survey,  $\chi^2(3) = 1.52$ ,  $ns$ . ANOVAs showed that those responding to the follow-up survey did not differ significantly from those who did respond on education,  $F(1, 730) = .98$ ,  $ns$ , or firm tenure,  $F(1, 730) = 3.11$ ,  $ns$ , but were significantly older,  $F(1, 730) = 23.40$ ,  $p < .01$ . Further, logistic regressions showed that Time 1 job satisfaction, job embeddedness, affective commitment, and continuance commitment were unrelated to participation in the follow-up survey. These results lessen the concern over response bias.

Among the 480 participants who completed our follow-up survey, 31 indicated they left the job they were in 9 months ago (turnover rate;  $p = 6.5\%$ ). Among the 480 participants, 88 of them self-identified as reluctant stayers from their initial survey responses (11 turnover cases;  $p = 12.5\%$ ), 53 as reluctant leavers (seven turnover cases;  $p = 13.2\%$ ), 306 as enthusiastic stayers (eight turnover cases;  $p = 2.6\%$ ), and 33 as enthusiastic leavers (five turnover cases;  $p = 15.2\%$ ). The turnover rates across the four PWSs exhibit a pattern consistent with PWST. That is, enthusiastic leavers had the highest turnover rate (15.2%) and enthusiastic stayers had the lowest (2.6%), while reluctant leavers and reluctant stayers stand in the middle (9.8% and 11.5%, respectively). Chi-square analysis showed that the turnover rates were significantly different across the four PWS groups,  $\chi^2(3) = 20.93$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Note that self-identified stayers had a more "accurate" projection of their staying (97.4% of enthusiastic stayers and 87.5% of reluctant stayers remained in their organization 9 months later),

whereas self-identified leavers were much less “accurate” in their projection of leaving the organization (13.2% of reluctant leavers and 15.2% of enthusiastic leavers left within 9 months). Three reasons may explain this difference. First, as preparation for leaving takes time, 9 months may be too short to capture the eventual departure for some employees, given that traditional turnover research suggests collecting turnover criteria up to 2 years. Second, leaving an organization is a big decision that has a profound impact on an employee’s career and personal life as well as family life. Thus, some employees may feel anxious about leaving and thereby postpone or overturn their departure. Third, employees’ PWSs can change over time, which may explain why eight enthusiastic stayers and 11 reluctant stayers eventually left. Enthusiastic stayers may experience abrupt negative events and turn into enthusiastic leavers, whereas reluctant stayers become free to leave as the barriers that previously held them are lifted (e.g., better alternatives appear, contractual obligation ends). Hom and colleagues (2012) discussed how employees can change from one state to another. Given the dramatic difference between the “accuracy” of projecting leaving and staying in our data, we suspect that it may be more common for enthusiastic leavers and reluctant leavers to turn into reluctant stayers and enthusiastic stayers than the other way around.

We hypothesized that the relationships between (a) job satisfaction (Hypothesis 10), (b) job embeddedness (Hypothesis 11), (c) intent to leave (Hypothesis 12), and turnover vary across the enthusiastic group and the reluctant group. To test these hypotheses, we conducted logistic regression for each variable. A dummy variable captured whether an employee belonged to the enthusiastic group (coded as 1) or the reluctant group (coded as 0). By examining the interaction of this dummy variable and each predictor (i.e., satisfaction, embeddedness, and intent to leave), we tested whether relationships between each predictor and actual turnover differed significantly across enthusiastic and reluctant groups. Table 6 presents the results of the three separate logistic regressions. The interaction was significant for job satisfaction

( $B = -1.04$ ,  $\text{Exp}[B] = .36$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and job embeddedness ( $B = -1.79$ ,  $\text{Exp}[B] = .17$ ,  $p < .05$ ), but marginally significant for intent to leave ( $B = .60$ ,  $\text{Exp}[B] = 1.81$ ,  $p < .10$ ). To confirm that relationships varied in the expected direction, we further conducted separate logistic regressions for (a) the overall sample ( $n = 480$ , with 31 turnovers; turnover rate = 6.5%), (b) the enthusiastic group ( $n = 339$ , with 13 turnovers; turnover rate = 3.8%), and (c) the reluctant group ( $n = 141$ , with 18 turnovers; turnover rate = 12.8%). Table 7 shows the results. Note that logistic regressions were performed separately, one variable at a time.

In the overall sample, job satisfaction had a significant, negative effect on turnover ( $B = -.52$ ,  $\text{Exp}[B] = .59$ ,  $p < .01$ ), explaining 6.3% of turnover variance. In the enthusiastic group, the negative effect was stronger ( $B = -.94$ ,  $\text{Exp}[B] = .39$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and job satisfaction explained more variance in turnover (12.7%). In the reluctant group, job satisfaction no longer had a significant effect on turnover ( $B = .10$ ,  $\text{Exp}[B] = 1.10$ ,  $ns$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 10 is supported.

Job embeddedness had a marginally significant, negative effect ( $B = -.55$ ,  $\text{Exp}[B] = .58$ ,  $p < .10$ ) on turnover in the overall sample, explaining 1.6% of turnover variance. In the enthusiastic group, it had a more negative effect on turnover ( $B = -1.14$ ,  $\text{Exp}[B] = .32$ ,  $p < .05$ ), explaining 5.9% of the variance in turnover. In the reluctant group, the effect of job embeddedness was not significant ( $B = .65$ ,  $\text{Exp}[B] = 1.92$ ,  $ns$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 11 is supported.

Last, intent to leave had a significant, positive effect on turnover in the overall sample ( $B = .58$ ,  $\text{Exp}[B] = 1.78$ ,  $p < .01$ ), explaining 8.9% of the variance in turnover. In contrast, it had a more positive effect on turnover in the enthusiastic group ( $B = .72$ ,  $\text{Exp}[B] = 2.04$ ,  $p < .01$ ), explaining more turnover variance (13.4%). On the other hand, the effect of intent to leave on turnover was not significant ( $B = .12$ ,  $\text{Exp}[B] = 1.13$ ,  $ns$ ) in the reluctant group. Together with the results of the interaction in Table 6, Hypothesis 12 is largely supported.

Table 6  
Logistic Regression Predicting Actual Turnover

Variable	B	SE	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)	-2 log likelihood	Nagelkerke $R^2$
Constant	-1.84	.31	35.88	**	.16		
Job satisfaction	.10	.23	.18	<i>ns</i>	1.10		
RelucVsEnthu <sup>a</sup>	-1.34	.43	9.48	**	.26		
Job Satisfaction $\times$ RelucVsEnthu	-1.04	.34	9.22	**	.36		
Model summary						205.64	12.9%
Constant	-1.80	.26	46.95	**	.17		
Job embeddedness	.65	.52	1.57	<i>ns</i>	1.92		
RelucVsEnthu <sup>a</sup>	-1.49	.40	13.63	**	.23		
Job Embeddedness $\times$ RelucVsEnthu	-1.79	.70	6.56	*	.17		
Model summary						210.69	10.3%
Constant	-2.10	.45	21.88	<i>ns</i>	.12		
Intent to leave	.12	.24	.24	<i>ns</i>	1.13		
RelucVsEnthu <sup>a</sup>	-1.78	.61	8.63	**	.17		
Intent to Leave $\times$ RelucVsEnthu	.60	.31	3.75	<sup>b</sup>	1.81		
Model summary						204.87	13.3%

Note. Turnover = 1, No turnover = 0; 31 turnover out of 480 responses; turnover rate = 6.5%. SE = Standard error; RelucVsEnthu = Reluctant vs. Enthusiastic; Sig. = significance; *ns* = not significant.

<sup>a</sup> Dummy variable. Employees are coded as 0 if they belong to either reluctant stayer or reluctant leaver, and as 1 if they belong to enthusiastic stayer or enthusiastic leaver. <sup>b</sup>  $p < .10$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 7  
Logistic Regression Predicting Actual Turnover Across Different Groups

Independent variables	Sample	B	SE	Sig.	Exp(B)	-2 log likelihood	Nagelkerke $R^2$
Job satisfaction	Overall sample ( $n = 480$ ) <sup>a</sup>	-.54	.15	**	.59	218.11	6.3%
	Enthusiastic group ( $n = 339$ ) <sup>b</sup>	-.94	.25	**	.39	98.12	12.7%
	Reluctant group ( $n = 141$ ) <sup>c</sup>	.10	.23	<i>ns</i>	1.10	107.52	.2%
Job embeddedness	Overall sample ( $n = 480$ ) <sup>a</sup>	-.55	.31	<sup>d</sup>	.58	226.81	1.6%
	Enthusiastic group ( $n = 339$ ) <sup>b</sup>	-1.14	.46	*	.32	104.66	5.9%
	Reluctant group ( $n = 141$ ) <sup>c</sup>	.65	.52	<i>ns</i>	1.92	106.03	2.2%
Intent to leave	Overall sample ( $n = 480$ ) <sup>a</sup>	.58	.14	**	1.78	213.37	8.9%
	Enthusiastic group ( $n = 339$ ) <sup>b</sup>	.72	.19	**	2.04	97.41	13.4%
	Reluctant group ( $n = 141$ ) <sup>c</sup>	.12	.24	<i>ns</i>	1.13	107.46	.3%

Note. Separate logistic regressions are conducted to show the differentiated relationships between predictor variable and turnover across (1) overall sample with every participant, (2) enthusiastic group with enthusiastic stayers and leavers, and (3) reluctant group with reluctant stayers and leaver. Turnover = 1; No turnover = 0. The logistic regressions are conducted with one variable at a time. *SE* = Standard error; *Sig.* = significance; *ns* = not significant. <sup>a</sup> 31 turnover out of 480 responses; turnover rate = 6.5%. <sup>b</sup> 13 turnover out of 339 responses; turnover rate = 3.8%. <sup>c</sup> 18 turnover out of 141 responses; turnover rate = 12.8%. <sup>d</sup>  $p < .10$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Note that five of the 31 leavers indicated their departure was involuntary (i.e., terminated by their organization). We conducted separate analyses with and without the five involuntary leavers, and the results omitting the 5 involuntary leavers did not change any conclusions on the significance of predictors.

**Low turnover rate issue.** The relatively low turnover rates for the overall sample ( $p = 6.5\%$ ) and the enthusiastic group ( $p = 3.8\%$ ) may potentially bias our findings. As such, we present additional arguments and analyses (rare event analysis and penalized maximum likelihood estimation) to address this concern. First, analyses of the data from respondents and nonrespondents show that those who responded to our follow-up survey did not significantly differ from those who did not respond on their PWS, job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and commitment. Thus, a response bias is not likely responsible for the low turnover rate. Second, a more recent meta-analysis on turnover (Rubenstein et al., 2015) found that 15 out of 214 (7%) published turnover studies had a turnover base rate of 6% or less. Thus, although a higher base rate is certainly preferable, our base rate is not excessively low relative to the body of published turnover studies. Third, lower base rates of turnover underestimate logistic regression coefficients. Thus, our study's low turnover rates render our study a conservative test of our turnover predictions. Even so, in the overall sample ( $p = 6.5\%$ ) and the enthusiastic group ( $p = 3.8\%$ ), in which the turnover rate is quite low, the effects of job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and intent to leave on turnover are all significant (the turnover rate for the reluctant group falls in a normal range,  $p = 12.8\%$ ).

Fourth, we use STATA to conduct rare event analysis (King & Zeng, 2001) and penalized maximum likelihood estimation (Firth, 1993) to provide a bias-corrected and more robust analysis for the turnover of enthusiastic group ( $p = 3.8\%$ ) and overall sample ( $p = 6.5\%$ ). Statisticians have long recognized that the rarity of occurred events relative to the observations on nonevents may bias estimation when using conventional logistic regression. (The rule of thumb for defining a rare event is  $p < 5\%$ ; King & Zeng, 2001.) Two accepted methods for addressing such potential bias are rare event analysis from the field of political science (King & Zeng, 2001) and penalized maximum likelihood estimation (Firth, 1993).

We compare results using (a) conventional logistic regression, (b) rare event analysis, and (c) penalized maximum likelihood estimation for the enthusiastic group ( $p = 3.8\%$ ) and the overall sample ( $p = 6.5\%$ ). The results with penalized maximization likelihood estimation yielded slightly different estimates but smaller standard errors than those of conventional logistic regression. Results from rare event analysis also showed slightly different estimates but larger standard errors than that of logistic regression. Perhaps most important, differences are quite minor and conclusions about statistical significance remain the same. These results provide evidence that our original findings with logistic regressions are not biased by our relatively low turnover rates.

Fifth, and for descriptive purposes only, we computed point-biserial correlations between predictor variables and turnover after adjusting the turnover rate in the enthusiastic group ( $p = 3.8\%$ ) to match the reluctant group ( $p = 12.8\%$ ). The calculation of the point-biserial correlation comes from the following formula (Nunnally, 1967):<sup>6</sup>

$$r_{pb} = \frac{M_t - M_n}{s} \sqrt{pq}.$$

Although the correlations before adjustment were derived from SPSS analysis, we projected what the correlation would be for the enthusiastic group if its turnover rate was comparable with the reluctant group, assuming the mean score difference and the standard deviation stayed the same as what we observed in the enthusiastic group. We recognize that this is a strong assumption to make, but we are presenting the adjusted correlation for descriptive, but not inferential, purpose. We calculated the new point-biserial correlations based on the new  $p$  value (12.8%). As a result, the adjusted point-biserial correlation with turnover was  $-.38$  for job satisfaction ( $r_{pb} = -.22$  before adjustment),  $-.24$  for job embeddedness ( $r_{pb} = -.14$  before adjustment), and  $.42$  for intent to leave ( $r_{pb} = .24$  before adjustment). These adjusted point-

<sup>6</sup>  $M_t$  = mean score on continuous variable of "turnover" group;  $M_n$  = mean score of continuous variable of "no turnover" group;  $s$  = standard deviation on continuous variable of total sample;  $p$  = proportion of persons in the "turnover" group; and  $q = 1 - p$ .



biserial correlations substantially exceeded previous estimates (cf. Griffeth et al., 2000).

## Discussion

Our results replicated Study 1 findings and corroborated attitudinal profiles of employees across the PWSs, furnishing strong support for the theoretical foundation of PWST. More importantly, Study 2 provided evidence in support of *how* PWST improves understanding and prediction of employee turnover. More specifically, we challenge the causal chain posited in heretofore dominant turnover models: distal influences (e.g., job and individual characteristics) → intermediate antecedents (e.g., job satisfaction, job embeddedness) → direct antecedents (job searching and intent to leave) → actual turnover (Mobley, 1977; Price & Mueller, 1981). First, we found that job searching and intent to leave exhibited a different pattern across the four PWSs from job attitudes and job embeddedness. Second, among reluctant stayers and reluctant leavers, job satisfaction and job embeddedness were not related to job searching and intent to leave. Most intriguingly, we showed that for those experiencing low control over their leaving or staying (i.e., reluctant stayers and leavers), standard turnover antecedents—such as job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and intent to leave—were poor turnover predictors. Exclusion of reluctant stayers and reluctant leavers from prediction models greatly improved turnover predictions by job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and intent to leave.

## General Discussion

Our article reports the first major and supportive tests on theorized relationships among PWSs, job attitudes, job search behavior, intent to leave, and turnover (Hom et al., 2012). In addition to testing Hom et al.'s thesis, we advance their original theory by demonstrating the moderating effects of psychological withdrawal states on relationships between prime turnover antecedents—namely, job attitudes, job search behavior, and intent to leave—and actual turnover (Rubenstein et al., 2015). More specifically, the two studies confirm our premise that predominant turnover models more accurately explain and predict turnover among employees who have high control over their preference for leaving or staying (i.e., enthusiastic stayers and leavers) but inaccurately explain and predict turnover among employees who have low control over their preference (i.e., reluctant leavers and reluctant stayers).

## Cognitive Dissonance Process in Reluctant Leavers

We theorized that reluctant leavers have similarly high affective commitment, job satisfaction, and job embeddedness as enthusiastic stayers (Hypothesis 3). We corroborated this hypothesis in Study 1, but found that reluctant leavers have significantly less positive attitudes than enthusiastic stayers in Study 2. Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) may account for this unexpected finding. The inconsistency between a reluctant leaver's desire to stay and reality that he or she must leave generates a negative intrapersonal state (dissonance), which motivates this individual employee to seek and implement strategies that alleviate such an aversive state. As a result, reluctant leavers may

deliberately think more about what they do not like about the job and intentionally detach themselves from the team, organization, and community. Thus, reluctant leavers may start off as satisfied and committed as enthusiastic stayers, but over time, their satisfaction, commitment, and embeddedness might decrease to some extent as a result of cognitive dissonance. Put differently, they align their attitudes with their impending behavior (i.e., leaving). Alternatively, some reluctant leavers may face pressures to leave by supervisors (perhaps due to subpar performance) or coworkers (due to gender or ethnic harassment). Although they may like other job features (e.g., compensation, job duties), dissatisfaction with such (mis)treatment may weaken their job attitudes relative to enthusiastic stayers.

## The Issue of Time in Assessing PWS and Attitudes

Relatedly, the pattern of job attitudes across the four PWSs may change if assessed at a different time. As Hom et al. (2012) theorized, job attitudes and external forces underpin employees' PWS, and the PWS will in turn affect their future attitudes. One way this happens is through the cognitive dissonance process. Specifically, if we capture the initial stage of employees becoming reluctant stayers or reluctant leavers, reluctant stayers should have low job satisfaction, as enthusiastic leavers do, and reluctant leavers should have high satisfaction, as enthusiastic stayers do (which is what we found in Study 1). But as the cognitive dissonance process evolves, reluctant stayers may still have relatively low satisfaction (but higher than that of enthusiastic leavers), and reluctant leavers may still have relatively high satisfaction (but lower than that of enthusiastic stayers), which is what Study 2 found.

## PWS Versus Preference and Control as Continuous Variables

As theorized, employees' preference over leaving or staying and control over that preference are the building blocks of PWS. We argue that the four PWSs are meaningful over and above relying on preference and control as continuous variables (including their two-way interaction) for several reasons. First, PWS categories reflect the person-center approach of envisioning the turnover process. As Hom et al. (2012) stressed, this approach is invaluable for identifying and conceptualizing complex profiles of variable scores that are otherwise difficult to envision with interaction terms and are thus often overlooked (Meyer et al., 2012; Morin, Morizot, Boudrias, & Madore, 2011). In contrast, prevailing variable-centered approaches often ignore or give short shrift to the more complex interactions among the major forces predicting turnover (such as commitment, satisfaction, job embeddedness, and job alternatives), and focus more on main effects or simpler two-way (linear) interactions of variables. In our view, PWST offers an important theoretical framework that synthesizes various streams of literature predicting turnover through profile analysis, and our study is a first and essential step toward establishing the validity of PWS in predicting turnover. Second, as Hom et al. further specified, there are subcategories within each PWS. For example, enthusiastic stayers may be further distinguished into truly engaged stayers and slackers (who would like to stay because life is easy here and they are not engaged at work). The investi-

gation of PWS subcategories is of critical value when considering other behavioral outcomes as well as turnover speed and destinations. Yet these subcategories cannot be captured only with preference for leaving or staying and control over the preference. Third, because actual staying or leaving is a dichotomous outcome, the anticipatory states of wanting to stay or leave and the control over that preference are best represented theoretically and psychologically by a categorical approach. Methodologically, by asking people to put themselves into one of the four states, participants should think more deeply about their preference and control. Because they are faced with a very clear dichotomous choice (staying or leaving), they should reflect in more categorical ways (unlike, e.g., considering how much effort they might exert on a particular task). In this way, we believe we are able to capture employees' PWS more accurately using the categorical procedure. Next, we further demonstrate the advantage of the categorical approach of PWST by highlighting the theoretical and empirical challenges of using perceived control as a moderator to test the PWST thesis.

### Perceived Control as a Moderator in Traditional Turnover Models

We found that job satisfaction, embeddedness, and intent to leave are better predictors of turnover for enthusiastic stayers and leavers than for reluctant stayers and leavers. One may then argue for perceived control over leaving or staying simply as a moderator in traditional turnover process models as opposed to relying on the four categories. Theoretically, however, control over leaving and control over staying are independent (even though we found a significant correlation in our study). That is, it is plausible that an employee has high control over staying (e.g., no external or internal pressures pushing him/her out) but low control over leaving (e.g., lack of better alternatives), or vice versa. Therefore, it is theoretically imprecise to construe perceived control as a unitary construct. Additionally, it is not meaningful to introduce control over leaving and control over staying separately as moderators into traditional turnover models for two reasons. First, Hom et al. (2012) propose that the four PWSs are derived by crossing employees' "(a) desired staying or leaving and (b) high or low perceived control of *this preference*" (p. 835; italics added). In steering actual turnover, control over leaving does not matter for those who have high preference for staying, whereas control over staying does not matter for those who have high preference for leaving. Thus, control over leaving as a moderator only takes into consideration reluctant stayers but not reluctant leavers, whereas control over staying is relevant for only reluctant leavers but not reluctant stayers. Therefore, these two separate moderators are incomplete and thereby weak reflections of the core idea of PWST. Second and more important, although perceived control over leaving and staying are continuous variables, we believe they do not change the predictive validity of attitudinal variables and turnover in a continuous pattern. With a 7-point Likert scale of perceived control, for example, dropping from 5 (*somewhat agree*) to 3 (*somewhat disagree*) represents a change from enthusiastic leaver to reluctant stayer, or from enthusiastic stayer to reluctant leaver, thus dramatically decreasing the predictive validity of attitudinal variables on turnover. In contrast, we expect that the decrease in predictive validity incurred by dropping from 7 to 5 (*remaining*

*enthusiastic*) or from 3 to 1 (*remaining reluctant*) will be less dramatic. Given these reasons, it is not surprising to find that, in our study, neither perceived control over leaving nor perceived control over staying moderates the effects of attitudinal variables (proxies for preferences) on actual turnover.

### Theoretical Implications

**Beyond the downward bias.** The reported empirical results suggest that prediction of turnover by job attitudes suffers from a downward bias because reluctant stayers and leavers' behaviors are not readily predicted from these attitudes. Reluctant stayers feel dissatisfied with their job and uncommitted to the organization, but continue to stay in the organization due to a host of extrinsic reasons such as inability to find another job, family embeddedness, and/or contractual obligations. By comparison, reluctant leavers may feel satisfied with their job and committed to the organization, but leave the organization due to reasons such as informal encouragement from supervisors to leave, spousal relocations, or family pressure to change jobs. As shown here, people with low control over their leaving or staying will significantly undermine the predictive validity of organizational attitudes on turnover.

**Beyond the unfolding model.** We recognize that our study is not the first to show that job attitudes such as job satisfaction are not always predictive of turnover. In particular, the unfolding model (e.g., T. H. Lee et al., 2008; T. W. Lee et al., 1999) identified three situations or paths in which employees' exits are not driven by accumulated job dissatisfaction: (a) personal shocks triggering planned exits, (b) negative job shocks, and (c) job-inquiry shocks. In contrast, the PWST and this study extend the unfolding model in three respects. First, we expand the model by showing that some satisfied employees may leave because they have to, not because precipitating events initiate thoughts of leaving. By identifying the situations that make employees have to leave (such as spousal relocation, urgent family pressures), we further our understanding about when and why satisfied people leave. Second, the unfolding model examines the (dis)satisfaction–turnover relationship by addressing when some satisfied people leave. We demonstrate how the presence of reluctant stayers or leavers can jeopardize this long-held relationship. Third, the unfolding model only addresses the (dis)satisfaction–turnover relationship, whereas our work offers a more comprehensive investigation of the validity of a variety of attitudes and cognitions in predicting turnover (such as commitment, job embeddedness, and intent to leave).

**Beyond the theory of planned behavior.** Although the role of perceived control is well articulated by the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), our work extends this theory in two ways. First, we provide contextual richness to the theory of planned behavior in the domain of employee turnover. By establishing the construct validity of PWS, we encourage future studies to theorize and examine additional factors that relate to employees' control over their leaving or staying. Second, the theory of planned behavior emphasizes perceived control as a predictor of behavior, neglecting potential interactions between attitudes (toward the act) and control (especially studies applying Ajzen's model to predict turnover; van Breukelen et al., 2004; Westaby, 2005). In contrast,

we cross preference and control to create four psychological states that may hold great promise for further turnover research.

In sum, the meaning of control highlighted in the PWST and our studies “extend the unfolding model, motivational forces model, and job embeddedness model by separating affect from perceived freedom and clarifying the etiology of experienced autonomous control” (Hom et al., 2012, p. 850). Over many years, turnover scholars have mostly scrutinized employees’ attitudes and distal individual and contextual factors that shape these attitudes. In turn, the dominant turnover models may have reached a ceiling explaining variance of turnover. Going forward, we offer three major suggestions for future research. First, as we empirically verify the existence of reluctant stayers and leavers and show that job attitudes fail to predict their leaving or staying, we now need to better elucidate the causes of low control in the turnover context (e.g., spousal influence on employee decisions to leave, family embeddedness, contractual obligations) and how it translates into action. Second, scholars might consider moving from striving to explain more turnover variance in traditional models. Instead, turnover researchers may well be advised to explore unique processes in different PWSs (i.e., reluctant states vs. enthusiastic states), because the reasons for leaving and staying for reluctant people appear substantially different from those of enthusiastic stayers and leavers. Third, we encourage future research to adopt a person-centered approach in considering employee turnover, in which profile analysis can be applied and more complex interactions among different antecedents can be better captured (Meyer et al., 2012; Morin et al., 2011). These profiles will help ascertain differential sources of control and preference for PWS theorized by Hom et al. (2012). Also, we encourage subsequent inquiries to investigate the subcategories within each PWS, because they can enhance prediction of other behavioral outcomes as well as turnover speed and destinations.

## Practical Implications

Because the focus of PWST and our work is to highlight the fact that there is a significant proportion of employees who have low control on their leaving and staying, we offer unique suggestions to practitioners based on our understanding of reluctant leavers and reluctant stayers. First, human resource (HR) departments should conduct careful exit interviews to identify reluctant leavers and obtain separate turnover rates by including and excluding them. A company’s turnover rate has always been a vital benchmarking index in the eyes of top management and HR managers (Hom, 2011). A high turnover rate can alert the company and HR management to problems in retaining employees and urge them to take actions. Nevertheless, our research on reluctant leavers indicates there is a significant number of employees who leave the organization due to forces outside their control, not because of job dissatisfaction or low job embeddedness. In many cases, these forces are not the fault of the company (e.g., some employees quit to become stay-at-home caregivers or to follow relocating spouses) and beyond managerial control. Therefore, HR departments should strive to ascertain the “true” motives for departure (carrying out exit interviews after employees had departed or hiring third-party interviewers) to identify how many employees leave not because they want to but because they have to (though mindful that leavers may “overstate” external reasons for leaving). In short, companies

can exclude reluctant leavers and calculate a refined turnover rate to gauge more validly the company’s effectiveness in retaining employees. Furthermore, as we know much less about what makes employees have to leave, companies—especially large ones—can accumulate exit interview data and identify the patterns of reluctant leavers. In particular, we encourage large organizations to adopt a big-data approach by collecting employee data over time, across work units and across levels, and thereby help to inform decisions about hiring, retention, and existing organizational policies and procedures (Hausknecht & Li, 2015).

Second, a company with a low turnover rate should not immediately believe that they are doing well with respect to employee motivation and retention, as our study showed that some dissatisfied people stay. The company or HR department should compare the turnover rate with the job dissatisfaction revealed in anonymous surveys. A significant mismatch between turnover rate and job satisfaction levels (e.g., turnover rate is lower than before but the proportion of employees feeling dissatisfied actually increases in comparison with a previous period) may signal the prevalence of reluctant stayers in the company (more people become dissatisfied but less people leave). In this case, HR departments should alert managers to expend effort to identify potentially dissatisfied employees as they can become reluctant stayers who may withhold effort on the job and exhibit counterproductive workplace behaviors (Hom et al., 2012). Once leaders identify potential reluctant stayers through observations and soliciting peer reviews (e.g., low engagement at work, high absences), they can take one of two actions. On one hand, leaders should engage in authentic and in-depth communications with potential reluctant stayers and find out why they are feeling dissatisfied with the team/company, whether there can be ways to help them fit into the company better, or address the issues that demotivate them. In addition, leaders can persuade these employees to reframe their staying by stressing autonomous motives rather than constraints (Hom et al., 2012). On the other hand, if the motivational problem for reluctant stayers cannot be easily fixed and the “constraint” mind-set cannot be easily changed, managers might help them overcome barriers that make them stay, such as releasing them from employment contracts, offering them buyout packages or early retirement benefits, or referring them to other companies, because keeping reluctant stayers might be costlier to the firm in the long term than letting them go.

## Study Limitations

Although Study 1 adopts a retrospective design and Study 2 adopts a complementary predictive design, similar findings emerged, signaling their robustness. Nonetheless, the inferences that can be drawn from our studies may be tempered by three points. First, the turnover rate ( $p = 6.5\%$ ) in the sample of Study 2 may not be ideal, when compared with an annual turnover rate of 20.4% across all industries, according to the report released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013). Our low turnover rate may also result because we collected turnover data 9 months after the first survey (instead of 12 months or longer) due to our concerns with participant attrition. Although additional analyses show that our findings do not appear affected by the low turnover rate, future research may seek to replicate our findings in a traditional organizational setting, in which researchers can observe turnover dur-



ing a longer period of time and capture more turnover variance. Second, Study 2 adopts the “standard research design” in which predictors are collected via a Time 1 survey and the criterion is collected at Time 2 (Steel, 2002). Although useful for our hypothesized predictions, this design is insensitive to changes over time. Hom et al. (2012) suggest how employees’ PWS might change over time. The unfolding model (T. W. Lee & Mitchell, 1994) suggests, moreover, that unexpected events (shocks) often cause people to leave in the time lag between measurement of turnover predictors and the turnover criterion. To study this dynamic process, multiple surveys administered over time are needed. With multiple surveys, future research can consider PWS changes and how PWS change hinges on the occurrence of shocks and change trajectories of other putative antecedents (e.g., motivational forces; Hom et al., 2012) during the study’s measurement window. Third, as the first major test of PWST, our PWS measures are exploratory in nature and may suffer from insufficient scale development. Going forward, research on their psychometric validity is sorely needed.

### Conclusion

Our research shows that PWSs enhance understanding and prediction of employee turnover, but also that the potential motivational effects from PWSs is useful for explaining and predicting other theoretical and applied outcomes. In our view, PWSs are worthy of future theoretical analysis and represent a promising direction for future empirical research.

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Received July 20, 2015

Revision received April 15, 2016

Accepted June 16, 2016 ■

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