Staying or leaving

A combined social identity and social exchange approach to predicting employee turnover intentions

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to combine social identity and social exchange theories into a model explaining turnover intentions.

Design/methodology/approach – Questionnaires measuring the constructs of organizational identification, perceived organizational support, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions were completed by 195 employees.

Findings – Results supported our hypotheses: social identification increased the perception of organizational support which in turn reduced emotional exhaustion which was finally related to turnover intentions. Furthermore, social identification moderated the relation between organizational support and turnover intentions.

Research limitations/implications – The study design was cross-sectional and data were collected using self-report with no assessment of objective data.

Practical implications – To reduce turnover, managers should focus on both support and employees' identification with teams and organizations.

Originality/value – This study combines two theoretical perspectives into an integrative framework and simultaneous moderated-mediation was used to test the model.

Keywords Social identity, Identification, Turnover intentions, Perceived organizational support, Emotional exhaustion, Social exchange

Paper type Research paper

The concepts of organizational identification and perceived organizational support have received substantial attention by researchers over the past two decades, and have been found to be positively related to work-related outcomes, such as employee satisfaction, motivation and performance, and negatively related to withdrawal behaviors. Research on organizational identification is based on the social identity theory, which states that part of employees' self-concept is based on their social (and in particular organizational) membership. More specifically, social identity is defined as

"that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his or her membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Ashforth and Mael (1989) were among the first who introduced the concept into the organizational domain and defined organizational identification as the feeling of oneness with the organization.

Perceived organizational support is based on the social exchange theory which claims that employees who feel treated fairly and receive what they think is appropriate in relation to their efforts are more motivated to perform on a high level and to stay with the organization. Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) introduced the concept of perceived organizational support as a reflection of the individual's global perceptions of the extent to which the organization values his or her contribution and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Eder and Eisenberger, 2008).

The aim of the present study is to integrate insights from both theories to predict turnover intentions and to test an integrated model that combines previous theoretical and empirical research (van Dick and Haslam, 2012; van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2007).

Our research is based on two recent conceptualizations by van Dick and Haslam (2012) and by van Knippenberg *et al.* (2007). First, van Dick and Haslam provide an overview of research that consistently shows reduced stress and burnout for employees who are more strongly identified with their teams and organizations, and that the relation between identification and stress is mediated by (higher) social support for more strongly identified compared to less identified employees. Following these arguments, we hypothesize that perceived organizational support mediates the relation between organizational identification and emotional exhaustion. We then predict that exhausted employees will be more prone to deal with strain by adopting an exit strategy, i.e., they will be more likely to develop intentions to quit.

Second, we draw on research by van Knippenberg *et al.* (2007) who have found across two different samples that negative employee behavior, such as absenteeism and turnover, is predicted by an interaction between organizational support and organizational identification. Specifically, only those employees who are not identified reduce their turnover with increasing perceptions of organizational support, whereas for the strongly identified employees no relation between support and turnover or absenteeism was found. Therefore, in addition to the mediation chain between identification and turnover intentions proposed by van Dick and Haslam (2012), we integrate results of van Knippenberg *et al.* (2007) regarding the interaction between identification and support, and we predict that organizational identification moderates the relation between perceived organizational support and turnover intentions. Figure 1 provides an overview of the hypotheses.

Hypotheses development

Voluntary turnover is a costly and thus undesirable employee behavior for organizations. It represents permanent exit from the organization and is often preceded by other withdrawal behaviors, such as lateness or absenteeism. Several studies have shown that both withdrawal intentions and behaviors are negatively related to organizational attitudes, such as organizational commitment and identification, or and job satisfaction (Cotton and Tuttle, 1986; Griffeth *et al.*, 2000; Riketta, 2005; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2007; van Dick *et al.*, 2004).

Despite substantial research, why employees decide to leave their organization is still an intriguing question. Following Bakker *et al.* (2003) results on absenteeism, we
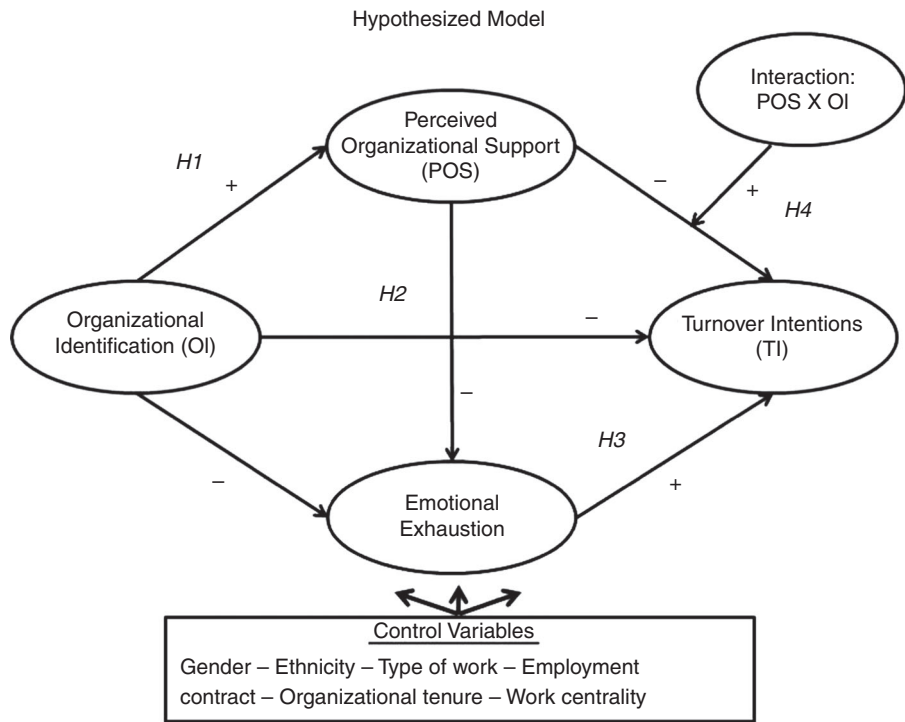
Hypothesized Model

argue that employees may want to escape from unsatisfactory work situations. For example, several studies have found a significant negative relation between job satisfaction and turnover intentions (for meta-analysis, see Podsakoff *et al.*, 2007). On the other hand, withdrawal behaviors may also represent an extreme reaction to job stress, and in this sense turnover may represent "a coping mechanism to deal with job strain" (Bakker *et al.*, 2003, p. 342). For example, burnout (and especially emotional exhaustion) was found to be related to withdrawal behaviors, such as turnover and absenteeism (Swider and Zimmerman, 2010). A recent meta-analysis by Podsakoff *et al.* (2007) found evidence for a mediational model in which job stressors increase employees' strain reactions, which in turn lead to both turnover intentions and behaviors. In summary, turnover (intentions) can be explained as an employee's escape strategy from unsatisfactory work conditions that may be exacerbated by the presence of a stressful work environment.

The relationship between employees and the organization is a key aspect of organizational behavior (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). The degree of employees' attachment to their organizations influences many important and valuable organizational and personal outcomes, such as in-role and extra-role performance, withdrawal behaviors, job satisfaction, and well-being (Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Riketta, 2005; Ng and Sorensen, 2008; Riggle *et al.*, 2009). In the organizational behavior literature, two important theories have been used to explain the nature and characteristics of this link, namely social identity theory (e.g. Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Hogg and Terry, 2000), and social exchange theory (e.g. Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Rousseau, 1990). The core idea of social identity

theory is that social groups are not merely characteristics of the external world; they are also internalized by individuals and contribute to their self-definition (Haslam, 2004). Being a member of a specific organization partly answers the individual's question of "who am I?" which helps produce a sense of meaningfulness and greater awareness of one's place in the social world (Ashforth *et al.*, 2008). For those reasons, organizational identification, or the readiness to define oneself in terms of one's organizational membership, is seen as a key to understanding numerous important organizational attitudes and behaviors (Edwards, 2005). Employees who are strongly identified with their organizations are likely to work harder in order to achieve organizational goals, therefore increasing their job performance and, in particular, extra-role performance. They show greater loyalty to their organizations and are thus more likely to remain with their organizations. Consequently, they should have lower turnover (intentions) and lower general withdrawal behaviors (e.g. lateness, absence). Finally, employees who are more strongly identified with and committed to their organizations show greater satisfaction with their jobs compared with their weakly identified colleagues (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Riketta, 2005; Riketta and van Dick, 2005). More recently, it has also been theoretically argued and empirically shown that a strong sense of shared identity relates to better employee health and less stress (for overviews, see Haslam and van Dick, 2011; van Dick and Haslam, 2012). Indeed, employees who perceive themselves as sharing a social (e.g. work) identity should both be more motivated and more likely to help each other. For those reasons, strongly identified employees will receive and provide more support, which provides them with stronger resources to cope with organizational stressors (van Dick and Haslam, 2012).

According to the social identity theory, employees incorporate the collective interest into their own self-concept so that employee and organization (partly) overlap. Social exchange theory, on the other hand, focusses on the quality of the exchange relations between employee and organization, which are – in contrast to the social identity approach – conceptualized as independent entities. From a social exchange perspective, employees' evaluations of the quality of their exchange relation with their organizations are key for their well-being and motivation. This relationship is built around the notion of social reciprocity, which defines specific obligations to be fulfiled in exchange for fair and adequate rewards including, but not limited to, money, career opportunities, job security, and emotional support (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Rousseau, 1990). This exchange relationship has been operationalized in many ways, with Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) concept of perceived organizational support being the most influential one. This construct evaluates the employees' perceptions of the organization's readiness to fairly reward greater employee effort to achieve organizational goals. When the employees' expectations that the organization values the employees' contributions to the organizational goals and cares about their well-being are met, employees will increase their effort and intention to quit will decrease (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Ng and Sorensen, 2008). Indeed, perceived organizational support is an important resource that helps employees cope with stress (Viswesvaran *et al.*, 1999; Lee and Ashforth, 1996; Halbesleben, 2006).

A handful of studies has provided evidence on the mediational role of support by colleagues in the relation between identification and burnout, in the sense that strongly identified employees perceive greater organizational support, which helps them reduce job burnout (van Dick and Haslam, 2012). Indeed, employees who are highly identified tend to perceive their colleagues more positively, and provide

and receive more cooperation and support (Haslam *et al.*, 2009). In particular, we predict:

> *H1*. Organizational identification (OI) will be positively associated with perceived organizational support (POS).

If employees perceive that their organization provides them with support, a fulfilment of the (expected) exchange relationship occurred, and the positive balance between employee effort and organizational rewards will lead to more employee health and well-being (Siegrist, 2008). Furthermore, the actual support from the organization provides a resource for coping with stressors, which will reduce employee levels of burnout (Maslach *et al.*, 2001; Halbesleben, 2006; Haslam *et al.*, 2009; van Dick and Haslam, 2012). Therefore, we predict:

> *H2*. Perceived organizational support (POS) will be negatively associated with emotional exhaustion (EE).

Employees who experience stress and develop burnout will be more likely to use exit strategies, i.e. they will have stronger intentions to leave the organization. We predict:

> *H3*. Emotional exhaustion (EE) will be positively associated with turnover intentions (TI).

Following the line of reasoning of van Knippenberg *et al.* (2007), employees are likely to quit their organizations because of dissatisfaction with the exchange relationship (e.g. poor support, contract breach, etc.). According to social identity theory, however, employees who are strongly identified with their organizations refrain from turnover because of a partial overlap between their self and the organization. If employees perceive a high-quality (exchange) relationship with their organization, they may feel obliged to remain, i.e. have low turnover intentions even when their identification is low. Moreover, when an employee is strongly identified, he/she may commit to the workplace even in the presence of a non-satisfactory (or at least not perfectly satisfactory) exchange relationship with the organization. However, and most importantly for our purposes, when employees are strongly identified, their perception of the quality of the exchange relationship with their organization tends to become less salient and less important in determining withdrawal behavior (van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2007). This means that organizational identification would buffer the lack of organizational support on withdrawal behaviors. In this regard, van Knippenberg *et al.* (2007) found a positive interaction between organizational identification, and organizational support, on turnover intentions and absenteeism, respectively. Hence the relation between supervisor support and withdrawal was weaker for highly identified employees. Accordingly, we hypothesize as in van Knippenberg *et al.*'s (2007) study, that organizational identification moderates the relation between perceived organizational support and turnover intentions, so that the relation is weaker for highly identified employees. This means that, when organizations satisfy employee expectations about the exchange relationship, employees will be more satisfied and feel strongly obligated to their organization, which will reduce their turnover intentions, especially when their organizational identification is low:

> *H4*. The relation between perceived organizational support (POS) and turnover intentions (TI) will be moderated by organizational identification (OI).

Method

Participants and measures

The research was conducted in a food industry firm, which is a market leader and located in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy. This organization has 813 employees in total, 373 of whom are female. Because of the firm's type of work, the majority of its workers are employed on a seasonal basis. In all, 727 employees are blue-collar workers, 98 are white-collars.

Before administration of the questionnaire a pre-test was conducted with ten employees. This pre-test obtained important information that led to partial modification of some items in the questionnaire. More specifically, prior to conducting the final survey, a meeting, which ten employees (including a foreign worker) from different departments and units of the organization attended, was held. During this meeting a preliminary version of the questionnaire was distributed to "validate" the instrument and to inquire about any specific features to reconsider. Afterwards, participants were asked to notify us of any concerns or questions. Some questions (which were not used in the present study) have been modified based on the information from the participants.

The questionnaire was provided during the delivery of pay-packets to all workers. Approximately 150 employees did not take the questionnaire. Two weeks later, employees were asked to return the completed questionnaires by putting them into boxes. In all, 210 questionnaires were returned, i.e. a 32 percent response rate. In total, 15 questionnaires were removed because of the excessive number of missing values and 195 responses are included in the final analyses. Participants were mainly female (66.3 percent), Italian (88.8 percent), blue-collar workers (51.9 percent), with seasonal contracts (46.5 percent). Their job tenure ranged from 1 to 46 years ($M = 21.44$; SD $= 10.71$), and their organizational tenure varied from 1 to 32 years ($M = 10.66$; SD $= 8.19$).

Organizational identification was measured with an Italian version of the six-item scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992) and translated by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000). Responses were given on a five-point scale ranging from "totally disagree" (1) to "totally agree" (5). A sample item is: "I am very interested in what others think about [name of organization]."

Perceived organizational support was measured by a four items scale developed by Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) (e.g. "The organization strongly considers my goals and values"). Responses were given on a five-point scale ranging from "totally disagree" (1) to "totally agree" (5).

Emotional exhaustion was measured using an Italian short version of Maslach and Leiter's three-dimensional MBI scale (Maslach and Leiter, 1997) by Borgogni *et al.* (2004). Responses were given on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "never" (1) to "every day" (7). This dimension consisted of five items (e.g. "Working all day is really a strain for me").

Turnover intentions were measured by a translation (following Brislin's, 1970, suggestions for translation and back-translation) of Konovsky and Cropanzano's (1991) three-item scale (sample item: "I often think of quitting this organization"). Responses were given on a seven-point scale ranging from "totally disagree" (1) to "totally agree" (5).

Control variables, first, we measured work centrality, defined in terms of the general belief regarding the importance of work in life (MOW International Research Team, 1987, p. 17) by using a single item: "How important is work in your life?" Responses were given on a 10-point scale ranging from "it's one of the less important things" (1) to

"it's one of the most important things" (10). Workers with high work centrality are prone to commit themselves strongly to their organization in order to build a long-standing relation. There is evidence that people with high work centrality show high levels of job satisfaction and low levels of turnover intentions (Bal and Kooij, 2011). We further included gender, ethnicity, type of work (blue- vs white-collar), and employment contract (permanent vs temporary), organizational tenure and work centrality and used them as control variables.

Results
α-coefficients for all variables in our study were satisfactory with coefficients ranging from 0.75 to 0.86. α's are shown together with descriptive statistics and correlations in Table I.

Measurement models
We first tested several measurement models to verify the factorial structure of our data, using LISREL 8.71 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 2004) with the covariance matrix as input, and maximum likelihood as the estimation method. Assessment of fit was based on several indices: χ^2-test; normed Chi-square (χ^2/df); comparative fit index (CFI); non-normed fit index (NNFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA).

In the first model (M_a), which represented the hypothesized model, the items of the four structural variables (organizational identification, perceived organizational support, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions) loaded on four distinct but correlated latent factors. In the second model (M_b) the items of organizational identification and perceived organizational support were forced into the same latent factor, while the items of emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions loaded onto two independent latent factors. Finally, in the third model (M_c), organizational identification and perceived organizational support items loaded on two independent latent factors, while emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions items were forced onto the same latent factor. Results indicate that the hypothesized model (M_a) had a good fit with the data ($\chi^2 = 181.83(129)$, $p < 0.01$; χ^2/df $= 1.41$; CFI $= 0.98$; NNFI $= 0.98$; RMSEA $= 0.044$, CI $= 0.027$-0.059) and that it was the best measurement model compared with the other models tested (see Table II). All indicators loaded significantly on the latent variables, with coefficients ranging from 0.41 to 0.89. Thus, the proposed distinctiveness of the four variables was supported.

Hypotheses tests
Given the sample size and the relatively complex model, we tested the hypotheses using observed variables. All continuous variables were standardized ($M = 0$, SD $= 1$) so that the coefficients describing relationships between continuous variables can be interpreted as standardized coefficients. We used Mplus 6.1 (Muthén and Muthén, 1998-2010) to estimate the hypothesized path model because it allows for bootstrapping to determine the significance of the indirect effects (cf. Edwards and Lambert, 2007).

Because we were testing a quite complex model, with many control variables and with both direct and indirect effects, we decided to add paths between control variables and structural variables only if at least two of the following three criteria were met:

(1) they were consistent with theoretical considerations;

(2) their presence was suggested by previous empirical evidence (e.g. meta-analyses); and

	α	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender[a]	–	0.66	0.48	–									
2. Ethnicity[b]	–	0.89	0.32	-0.04	–								
3. Type of work[c]	–	0.52	0.50	0.35***	-0.25**	–							
4. Employment contract[d]	–	0.31	0.46	-0.48***	0.24**	-0.41***	–						
5. Organizational tenure	–	10.73	8.24	12	0.32***	-0.06	0.08	–					
6. Work centrality	–	7.80	1.75	-0.12	-0.26***	0.12	0.06	-0.17*	–				
7. Organizational identification (OI)	(0.86)	3.67	0.94	-0.09	-0.18*	0.02	0.09	0.09	0.39***	–			
8. Organizational support (POS)	(0.75)	2.67	0.86	-0.17*	-0.18*	0.03	0.06	0.01	0.26***	0.42***	–		
9. Emotional exhaustion	(0.80)	3.28	1.27	0.02	0.05	0.12	-0.04	0.09	-0.54	-0.16*	-0.27***	–	
10. Turnover intention	(0.83)	2.75	1.72	-0.07	0.20**	-0.15*	0.15*	-0.11	0.27***	-0.40***	-0.47***	0.35***	–
11. Interaction OI X POS	–	–	–	-0.05	0.03	0.06	0.00	-0.11	-0.09	-0.26***	0.06	0.04	0.17*

Notes: $n = 195$ (listwise). [a]Gender coded: 0 = male and 1 = female; [b]ethnicity coded: 0 = foreign workers and 1 = Italian workers; [c]type of work: 0 = other type of work and 1 = blue-collar workers; [d]employment contract: 0 = contingent contract and 1 = permanent contract. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)

Table I.
Means, standard deviations, reliabilities (in parentheses), and correlations between the variables

	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	$\Delta\chi^2$(df)	NNFI	CFI	RMSEA (95% CI)
M_c Three-factor model	365.14	132	2.77	183.31 (3)***	0.90	0.91	0.12 (0.11-0.13)
M_b Three-factor model	330.51	132	2.50	148.68 (3)***	0.91	0.92	0.095 (0.084-0.011)
M_a Four-factor model	*181.83*	*129*	*1.41*	*–*	*0.98*	*0.98*	*0.044 (0.027-0.059)*

Notes: $n = 195$; χ^2, Chi-Square test; p, significance test of χ^2; df, degrees of freedom; NNFI, non-normed fit index; CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; CI, confidence interval; $\Delta\chi^2$(df), χ^2 difference (degrees of freedom) between M_a-M_b, and between M_a-M_c, respectively. M_a, organizational identification, perceived organizational support, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions items loaded on four correlated latent factors; M_b, organizational identification and perceived organizational support items loaded on the same latent factor, while emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions items loaded on two other independent latent factors. All factors were correlated. M_c, organizational identification and perceived organizational support items loaded on two independent latent factors, while emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions items loaded on the same latent factor. All factors were correlated. The indices indicated in italics refer to the hypothesized model considered in this study. *** $p < 0.001$

Table II.
Fit indices of the CFAs on study variables

(3) there was a significant zero-order correlation between control and structural variables in our sample.

Fulfilment of the criteria is summarized in Table III. Paths that did not meet these criteria were assumed to be zero, so that the corresponding parameters were fixed, while the correlations between all control variables were allowed.

In particular, we included the following paths between control and structural variables (the corresponding parameters were relaxed in all models): from gender to perceived organizational support; from ethnicity to organizational identification, perceived organizational support, and turnover intentions; from organizational tenure to organizational identification, perceived organizational support, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions; from work centrality to both organizational identification and turnover intentions; from type of work to both emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions; and finally, from employment contract to both organizational identification and turnover intentions, for a total of fourteen parameters to be estimated (see Table IV).

Control variables	Organizational identification (OI)	Structural variables Perceived organizational support (POS)	Emotional exhaustion	Turnover intentions
Gender		b,c	b	
Ethnicity	a,b,c	b,c	a	a,b,c
Type of work	a		a,b	a,b,c
Employment contract	a,b		b	b,c
Organizational tenure	a,b	a,b	a,b	a,b
Work centrality	a,c	c		b,c

Notes: Only the paths marked by at least two letters were tested in the final model. [a]Theoretical criteria met; [b]previous empirical data (meta-analyses) met; [c]significant correlations in this sample met

Table III.
Criteria for the selection of the paths from control variables to structural variables

	Identification	Dependent variable Support	Exhaustion	Turnover intentions
Predictor variable				
Identification	–	0.39 (0.07)**	−0.08 (0.08)	−0.13 (0.07)
Support	–	–	−0.26 (0.08)**	−0.28 (0.07)**
Identification × support	–	–	–	0.13 (0.06)*
Exhaustion	–	–	–	0.29 (0.06)**
Control variables				
Gender	–	−0.32 (0.14)*	–	–
Ethnicity	−0.47 (0.22)*	−0.48 (0.22)	–	0.19 (0.20)
Type of work	–	–	0.29 (0.14)*	−0.21 (0.13)
Employment contract	0.17 (0.14)	–	–	0.31 (0.14)*
Organizational tenure	0.17 (0.07)*	0.07 (0.07)	0.11 (0.07)	−0.17 (0.06)**
Work-centrality	0.35 (0.07)**	–	–	−0.13 (0.06)*
R^2	0.17**	0.21**	0.11**	0.39**

Notes: $n = 195$ (listwise). –, fixed to zero or not applicable; Dummy-coding (1 = yes, 0 = no) was used for the variables Gender (1 = female), Ethnicity (1 = Italian workers), Type of work (1 = blue-collar workers), and Employment contract (1 = permanent contract). All other variables in the model (except for the interaction term) were z-standardized ($M = 0$, SD = 1). * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table IV. Unstandardized path coefficients and standard errors for hypothesized model

The hypothesized model fitted the data adequately ($\chi^2 = 14.93(17)$, $p = 0.60$; $\chi^2/\mathrm{df} = 0.88$; GFI = 0.91; AGFI = 0.88; CFI = 1.00; SRMR = 0.03, the SRMR is the standardized root mean square residual and a convention is to consider values smaller than 0.05 as indicative of good fit; see for this and other evaluations of fit indices Schermelleh-Engel *et al.*, 2003). The hypothesized paths were significant and in the expected direction (see Table IV). In line with our first three hypotheses, paths from organizational identification to perceived organizational support ($b = 0.39$; $p < 0.01$), from perceived organizational support to emotional exhaustion ($b = −0.26$; $p < 0.01$), and from emotional exhaustion to turnover intentions ($b = 0.29$; $p < 0.01$) were all significant and in the expected directions (*H1*, *H2*, and *H3*, respectively, confirmed), whereas no significant direct relations were found between organizational identification and turnover intentions or emotional exhaustion ($b = −0.13$; $p = 0.07$, and $b = −0.08$; $p = 0.32$; respectively).

Further, we tested the mediational model by examining the confidence intervals for the indirect effects of organizational identification on turnover intentions. We used bias-corrected 95 percent confidence intervals based on 1,000 bootstrap samples. As shown in Table V, organizational identification had a negative indirect relation with turnover intentions based on two distinct routes. First, identification indirectly reduced turnover intentions by increasing support, which in turn reduced emotional

Indirect effect	Point estimate (95% CI)
Identification → Support → Exhaustion → Turnover intentions	−0.03 (−0.06, −0.01)
Identification → Support → Turnover intentions	−0.11 (−0.19, −0.05)
Identification → Exhaustion → Turnover intentions	−0.02 (−0.08, 0.02)
Total indirect effects of identification on turnover intentions	−0.16 (−0.25, −0.08)

Note: Shown are 95 percent bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals obtained from 1,000 bootstrap draws

Table V. Average indirect effects and 95 percent bootstrap confidence intervals

exhaustion, which in turn reduced turnover intentions ($b = -0.03$, CI $= -0.06$ to -0.01). Second, identification indirectly reduced turnover intentions by increasing support, which in turn directly reduced turnover intentions ($b = -0.11$, CI $= -0.19$ to -0.05). As a result, and in line with our hypotheses, the total indirect effect of organizational identification on turnover intentions was negative and significant ($b = -0.16$, CI $= -0.25$; -0.08). The full empirical model is depicted in Figure 2.

Finally, in line with *H4*, the path from perceived organizational support and turnover intentions was negative and significant ($b = -0.28$; $p < 0.01$), and moderated by organizational identification ($b = 0.13$; $p = 0.02$). Following Aiken and West (1991), we tested the simple slopes for employees with higher identification (i.e. 1 SD above the mean) and lower identification (i.e. 1 SD below the mean) to determine the nature of the interaction between perceived organizational support and organizational identification. As can be seen in Figure 3 and in line with our hypothesis, perceived organizational support was strongly and negatively related to turnover intention for employees with lower identification ($b = -0.40$, $p < 0.01$), while the relationship between perceived organizational support and turnover intention was weaker and non-significant for employees with higher identification ($b = -0.15$, $p = 0.09$).

Effects of controls
With respect to the control variables, only a few paths were significant. In particular, gender had a negative and significant impact on perceived organizational support ($\gamma = -0.32$; $p < 0.05$), which means that men perceived significantly less organizational
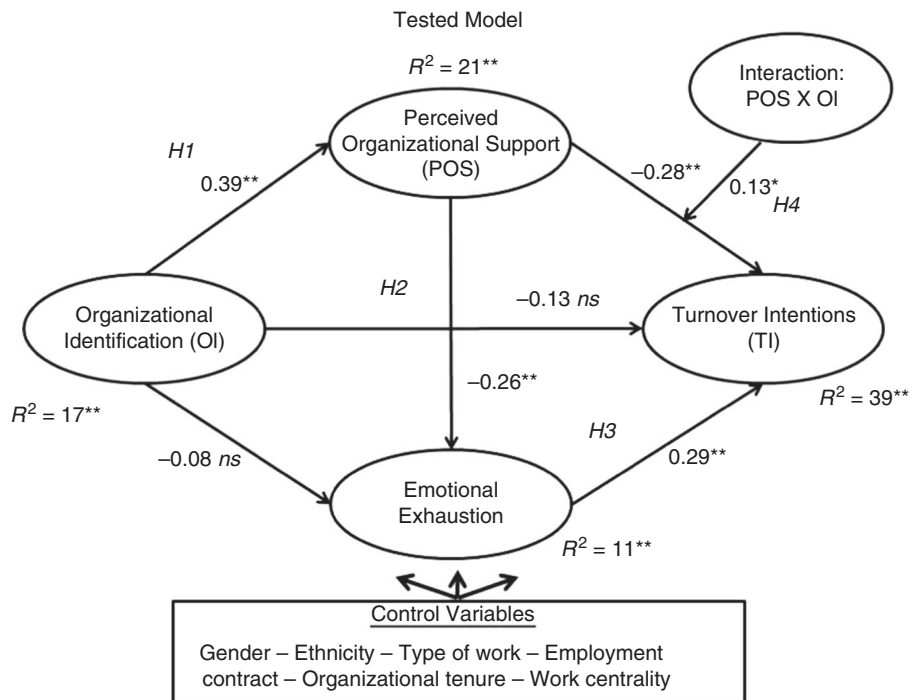

Figure 2.
Tested full model
with paths

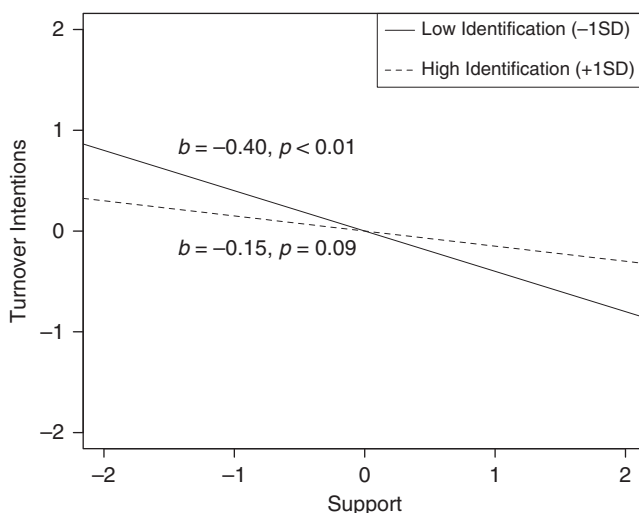**Notes:** $n = 195$ (listwise). *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

Figure 3.
Simple slopes of the direct effect of support on turnover intentions at high and low levels of identification

support than women. Ethnicity significantly and negatively affected organizational identification ($\gamma = -0.47$; $p < 0.05$), with foreign workers being less identified with their organization than their Italian colleagues. Type of work was significantly and positively related to emotional exhaustion ($\gamma = 0.29$; $p < 0.05$), which means that blue-collar workers were more likely to show emotional exhaustion than white-collar employees. Employment contract correlated with turnover intentions ($\gamma = 0.31$; $p < 0.05$), meaning that, unexpectedly, employees with permanent contracts reported stronger intentions to quit than their colleagues with contingent contracts – maybe because the latter perceived the (typically single season) contract as too short a time-span to quit. Organizational tenure affected both turnover intentions ($\gamma = -0.17$; $p < 0.01$), and organizational identification ($\gamma = 0.17$; $p < 0.05$). Finally, work centrality affected organizational identification ($\gamma = 0.35$; $p < 0.01$), and turnover intentions ($\gamma = -0.13$; $p < 0.05$).

Discussion
The aim of the present study was to develop a model to explain turnover intentions by combining two distinct theories concerning the relation between organizations and their employees, namely social exchange and social identity theories. Turnover can be seen as representing the failure of the relationship between employees and their organizations. We postulated that it may be considered an escape strategy used by employees to withdraw from one's job when the work environment is perceived as unsupportive and stressful.

Theoretical implications
Our model assumes that highly identified employees have a greater propensity to stay within the organization and proposes two mediational pathways for this relationship. Identification should increase perceptions of organizational support, which then has both direct and indirect effects on turnover intentions. Building on van Knippenberg *et al.* (2007), we predicted that organizational identification would moderate the direct effect of organizational support on turnover intentions.

We have argued that both the obligation felt toward the organization, induced by a positive employee evaluation of the relationship with their organization (as predicted by social exchange theory), and the employees' desire to continue to maintain a self-consistency relation with their organization (as predicted by social identity theory), introduce a psychological barrier against employee turnover. Furthermore, when employees are strongly identified with their organizations, the employee's evaluation about the fairness of organizational treatment becomes less important in determining their behavior. Thus, we predicted that identification would buffer the impact of (low) organizational support on withdrawal. The results again confirmed our hypothesis showing that for strongly identified employees the link between support and turnover intentions was weaker than for less identified employees.

The second mediational pathway builds on the social identity model of stress (van Dick and Haslam, 2012). According to this model, the perceived organizational support resulting from identification should lead to less emotional exhaustion and, finally, lower turnover intentions. The data confirmed this mediational model and provided evidence for an indirect effect of organizational identification on turnover intentions through these two mediational pathways.

In summary, we believe that our research has contributed in integrating the different roles of organizational identification in the complex interplay between the perceived organizational support and turnover relation.

Practical implications

In line with past research we have shown that organizational identification is a key variable. It first relates to turnover intentions by helping employees to perceive stronger support that helps them cope with stress (indirect effect via organizational support and emotional exhaustion). At the same time, it helps those who do not feel optimally supported to maintain the relationship with their organization (moderation of the effect of support on turnover intentions that is not mediated by emotional exhaustion). We are not implying that organizations should abuse their employees' identification and that they can treat them with little respect and unfairness in the long run. Quite the opposite – we strongly believe that high identification can only be sustained if it develops on the basis of fair and respectful relationships between individual and group. When this is achieved, however, identification may buffer short-term lacks of support that every organization will experience from time to time due to economic crises and other external pressures. Practitioners, therefore, are well advised to create environments in which employees can identify not only with both the teams in which they are working but also with the organization's overall mission and vision. One way to increase employee identification is to focus on organizational identification of leaders and supervisors. Research has consistently shown that when leaders identify with their organizations, this spills over to their employees (van Dick *et al.*, 2007; Schuh *et al.*, 2012; van Dick and Schuh, 2010) – but again this needs to be done on a sustainable basis and in a genuine manner to achieve deep structure and not only short-term (situated) identification (Riketta *et al.*, 2006).

Limitations and directions for future research

As most research, this study also has several limitations. First, both the fact that the data were collected in only one industry and the moderate response rate suggest

that more research is necessary to generalize the findings (see for similar arguments Giorgi, 2012, p. 272). Second, the data were collected using cross-sectional, self-report measures only. Common method variance may thus account in part for the main effects, but not for our interaction hypothesis. Evans (1985) and McClelland and Judd (1993) argue that common method variation cannot artificially increase interaction effects in regression analyses because these problems are controlled for by the inclusion of the main effects. The use of self-report for measuring turnover intentions seems not so much of a problem given that there is substantial evidence for intentions predicting actual turnover reasonably well (Steel and Ovalle, 1984; Hom *et al.*, 1992; Tett and Meyer, 1993; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2007; Zimmerman and Darnold, 2009). However, future research obtaining objective data on turnover (or related employee outcomes such as absenteeism or performance) would be highly desirable. Finally, the relatively low response rate might be explained by the fact that the foreign employees might have felt their Italian proficiency was inadequate. The response rate is, however, comparable to those in other studies (e.g. 22 percent in Ford and Tetrick, 2011).

Despite these limitations, we think that our study also has some strengths. To the best of our knowledge, this was the first attempt to combine different theoretical models about the pathway of organizational identification's impact on turnover intentions simultaneously. We therefore believe that having uncovered the role that identification plays both as a predictor and a moderator in the complex link between support, stress, and turnover provides interesting avenues for both future research and organizational practice.

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