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# A Study on the Impact of Employee Work Engagement on Turnover Intention: The Mediating Role of LMX and the Moderating Role of Leadership Support

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study investigates the factors influencing turnover intention among catering practitioners in Shanghai, China. Guided by social exchange theory, the research seeks to understand how work engagement, leadership-deployment exchange relationships, and leadership support interact to impact turnover intention in the catering industry. **Research design, data and methodology:** Data were collected using a questionnaire administered to 544 catering practitioners in Shanghai. The study employed statistical analyses to examine relationships among work engagement, leadership-deployment exchange, turnover intention, and leadership support. **Results:** The findings reveal several significant relationships: 1) work engagement negatively influences turnover intention, reducing practitioners' likelihood of leaving their positions; 2) work engagement positively impacts the leadership-deployment exchange relationship; 3) leadership-deployment exchange relationships negatively affect turnover intention; 4) the leadership-deployment exchange relationship mediates the relationship between work engagement and turnover intention; and 5) leadership support moderates the relationship between work engagement and turnover intention, strengthening its negative impact. **Conclusions:** The study provides actionable recommendations for reducing turnover in the catering industry. First, establishing an incentive system can enhance employees' work engagement. Second, fostering effective communication between supervisors and employees can improve leadership-deployment exchange relationships. Finally, leveraging leadership support within organizations can further mitigate turnover intention, creating a more stable workforce in the catering sector.

**Keywords :** Work Engagement, Leadership and Deployment Exchange Relationship, Leadership Support, Turnover Intention

**JEL Classification Code:** M12, M54, C12

## 1. Introduction

The issue of leadership has always been the most important aspect among managers. The key to the sustainability of an enterprise lies in the management of human capital, especially the role of managers, and how to perfect the role of integrating team resources allocation. Day (2024) believes that leadership is not a fixed format, but a complex and varied challenge that develops in a predictable pattern through various challenges. However, among leaders of different countries, fields or genders, there is still

a significant common feature, which is the ability to communicate. Therefore, in addition to the necessary professional knowledge and skills, successful managers should also possess other important qualities. If they know how to use communication skills to resolve conflicts with subordinates, they can gain the trust of the organization and cultivate team cooperation within the organization. A competent manager should be able to stimulate subordinates to tap into their potential through effective means, thereby having a positive impact on the organization. They should also assist in the operation of the organization and cope with

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changes in the external environment. Communication and interaction between leaders and subordinates have become an important link connecting the overall enterprise, and the relationship and cooperation between the two sides can also affect the overall work input of the organization (Gopinath, 2020).

This study believes that an autocratic leadership style can cause subordinates to refuse to express their true feelings, and leaders cannot learn exact ideas from subordinates, resulting in an information gap between leaders and subordinates. Additionally, scholars Liang (2024) pointed out that Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) is related to work deployment commitment but shows a decreasing trend with deployed turnover behavior. This study aims to explore whether LMX can reduce employees' tendency to leave and the possibility of playing a bridging role in commitment and turnover behavior. The job of a leader is to enable everyone to self-manage without having to manage every detail personally. Leaders only need to track efficiency progress and trust subordinates to handle the details.

Employees may want to leave for various reasons, including a lack of goals, a lack of accomplishment, or a poor relationship with their supervisor. These factors can significantly impact an employee's job dedication and overall job satisfaction. As time goes by and employees become more experienced and gain expertise in their roles, they may become internal experts within the organization. This can be a valuable asset to the company as these employees often have a wealth of knowledge and experience that can benefit the organization in many ways. However, if these employees choose to leave at this stage, it can result in significant losses for both the employee and the organization.

One of the biggest losses that employees may experience when leaving a company is the achievements they have accumulated during their tenure. Over the years, employees may have completed major projects, achieved important goals, and contributed to the organization's success in various ways. Leaving their job at this stage could result in the loss of these achievements, which are difficult to replace. In addition to the loss of achievements, leaving at this stage can also result in the loss of friendships and relationships with colleagues. Over time, based on shared experiences, shared goals, and mutual respect, employees may have developed close connections with their colleagues and superiors. These relationships can be an important source of support and motivation, and leaving may result in the loss of these connections.

Listening is one of the most important skills for leaders, as it involves understanding and empathizing with subordinates' feelings and perspectives, and being able to

put oneself in their shoes. This emotional intelligence is critical for interpersonal communication in the exchange process between leaders and followers, or in the management of interpersonal relationships at work. Therefore, working under a leader with high emotional intelligence leads to greater job satisfaction for subordinates, particularly for those with lower emotional intelligence (Xu & Zhao, 2011). This study suggests that an authoritarian leadership style can cause subordinates to withhold their thoughts and feelings, resulting in a gap in information between leaders and subordinates. Additionally, scholars such as Liang (2024) have pointed out that LMX (leader-member exchange) and subordinates' intentions to leave are inversely related, and whether LMX can reduce subordinates' tendency to quit is also one of the factors that this study aims to explore. Leadership is about empowering each individual to self-manage, without having to micromanage every detail. Leaders should focus on tracking progress and efficiency, while trusting subordinates to handle the details.

This study will focus on investigating the factors related to turnover intention among food service employees, with the primary goal of exploring whether the relationship between LMX and work engagement affects turnover intention. The study aims to determine whether improvements in LMX, work engagement, leadership support, and turnover intention can effectively reduce the turnover rate in the food service industry. The ultimate objective of this research is to provide useful insights for food service companies to decrease employee turnover and mitigate the risk of talent loss. The research topics are outlined as follows, based on the objectives mentioned above:

1. Can work engagement have a negative impact on turnover intention?
2. Can work engagement have a positive impact on LMX?
3. Does LMX have a negative impact on turnover intention?
4. Does LMX mediate the relationship between work engagement and turnover intention?
5. Does leadership support have an interfering effect on the relationship between work engagement and turnover intention?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Work engagement and Turnover Intention

Employees who are fully invested in their work are more likely to develop strong emotional connections to it, which

can lead to attachment and a sense of belonging. This attachment makes it harder for them to consider leaving, as it would require them to give up valuable identity and social support sources. In addition, dedicated employees are more likely to experience higher levels of job satisfaction, as their dedication brings them more positive outlooks and greater sense of achievement in their work. When employees are satisfied with their work, they are less likely to feel motivated to seek out new job opportunities. Finally, committed employees are more likely to be devoted to their organization and its goals. This sense of organizational commitment can lead to a stronger belief in the organization's mission and values, as well as greater investment in its future (Baş, 2022). When employees feel invested in their organization, they are less likely to want to leave and less likely to harm the organization they have come to care about.

In Hognestad Haaland et al. (2021) study, it was found that job involvement among hospital nurses reduced their intention to quit. Nurses who have strong passion and involvement in their work tend to have higher job satisfaction and pride. Similarly, in Liu's (2020) study, it was reported that privately-owned kindergarten teachers who had high job involvement had lower intention to quit. This is because job involvement increases their professional identity, leading to stronger commitment to the organization and reduced intention to quit.

In the food and beverage industry, services provided are often intangible and cannot be stored for later use. Therefore, the service experience highly depends on the interaction between service personnel and customers, and service staff must be enthusiastic and engaged in their work to provide a positive customer experience. This is why understanding the relationship between work engagement and turnover intention among food and beverage service staff is important. Further research is needed to investigate the proposed hypothesis and determine if work engagement has a significant impact on the turnover intention of food and beverage service staff. If confirmed, this could have important implications for the management of food and beverage service organizations, as they can develop strategies to increase service staff engagement and create a more loyal and stable workforce. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1:** Work engagement negatively affects turnover intention.

## 2.2 Work engagement and LMX

In the field of organizational behavior, the relationship between work engagement and LMX has been widely studied. From low-quality communication characterized by limited communication and low trust to high-quality communication characterized by open communication,

mutual trust, and respect. Several studies have found a positive correlation between work engagement and high-quality LMX (Kim & Han 2022). In high-quality LMX, leaders tend to see their subordinates as unique individuals and invest time and effort in developing personal and professional relationships with them. Highly engaged employees are more likely to engage in behaviors valued by leaders, such as taking initiative and assuming extra responsibilities, which helps to develop high-quality LMX.

High-quality LMX has been shown to be associated with many positive outcomes for employees, such as increased job satisfaction, higher levels of organizational commitment, and decreased turnover intention. Leaders who have high-quality LMX relationships with their employees are also more likely to achieve higher leadership effectiveness and performance ratings. Therefore, organizations can benefit from cultivating high-quality LMX relationships between leaders and subordinates. By investing in building personal and professional relationships with their employees, leaders can increase work engagement and reduce turnover intention, leading to positive outcomes for the organization and its employees.

The LMX theory suggests that the work relationship between leaders and subordinates is an interactive and dynamic process that can have a positive impact on employee engagement and performance (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In high-quality LMX relationships, leaders establish a relationship with their subordinates based on mutual trust, respect, and support, which helps to inspire employee enthusiasm and engagement. Some studies have shown a positive correlation between high-quality LMX and employee engagement, indicating that a high-quality relationship between leaders and subordinates promotes employee engagement and performance improvement (Kalyar et al., 2020). An important mechanism is that high-quality LMX inspires employees' innovation and exploration spirit, making them more willing to try new methods and ideas, and improving their skills and abilities (Naz, 2019). This interactive relationship can establish employees' sense of security and self-identity, enabling them to express their needs and opinions more actively and perform better at work. Some studies have shown that leaders who focus on the needs and feelings of their subordinates, provide timely positive feedback and support, and establish trust and respect with their subordinates can further improve work quality and efficiency (Kim & Han, 2022).

In addition, high-quality LMX can also help employees build better work relationships and networks, and obtain more resources and information support (Naz, 2019). By establishing good interpersonal relationships, employees can gain more support and resources, thus better completing work tasks, improving work performance, and satisfaction.

High-quality LMX can also stimulate employees' initiative and willingness to take on extra responsibilities, further promoting their work engagement and performance improvement. In summary, high-quality LMX is an important mechanism that can promote employees' work engagement and performance improvement. Building good work relationships and interpersonal networks, paying attention to employees' needs and feelings, and providing timely positive feedback and support are key factors for leaders to establish high-quality LMX (Park et al., 2019). This high-quality LMX can enhance employees' sense of self-identity and security, stimulate their innovation and exploration spirit, thereby enhancing overall leadership effectiveness and creativity. Therefore, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

**H2:** Work engagement positively affects LMX.

### 2.3 LMX and Turnover Intention

In the context of high-quality LMX, leaders tend to view their subordinates as unique individuals and invest time and effort in developing personal and professional relationships with them. This investment in relationships can bring higher levels of trust, respect, and support (Kim & Han, 2022). When employees are satisfied with their work and committed to serving the organization, they are less likely to have the intention to quit (Nugraha, 2019). High-quality LMX can also enhance employees' organizational identification, further reducing their intention to leave. For example, employees who feel valued and respected by their leaders are more likely to perceive a connection with the organization and its goals, which can increase their motivation to stay in the organization. High-quality LMX is positively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which is negatively related to turnover intention (Van Dam et al., 2008). Employees who have good relationships with their leaders tend to be more satisfied with their work, more loyal to the organization, and therefore less likely to quit. Additionally, when employees feel that their leaders view them as unique individuals and invest in their personal and professional development, they are more likely to experience a sense of reciprocity and obligation to stay in the organization.

In conclusion, high-quality LMX can have a significant impact on employee turnover intention by increasing job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and sense of belonging. Leaders who invest in developing personal and professional relationships with their subordinates can foster a sense of mutual trust, respect, and support, leading to a more loyal and satisfied workforce. By assessing and investing in employees, leaders can reduce the likelihood of turnover and create a more stable and efficient work environment.

On the other hand, low-quality LMX is associated with higher levels of turnover intention. In these relationships, leaders tend to view their subordinates as interchangeable and invest little time or effort into these relationships, which can lead to dissatisfaction, low morale, and a lack of trust in the leader, increasing the employee's desire to leave the organization (Dane & Brummel, 2014). Additionally, low-quality LMX can lead to a toxic work environment where employees are subjected to negative treatment such as neglect, abuse, or bullying. This type of work environment can decrease employees' job satisfaction and increase their intention to quit.

Low-quality LMX is associated with higher levels of employee turnover intention. In these relationships, leaders tend to view their subordinates as interchangeable and invest little time or effort in developing personal or professional relationships with them. This lack of investment leads to dissatisfaction, low morale, and a lack of trust in leaders, which in turn increases the likelihood of employees leaving the organization (Dane & Brummel, 2014).

Carnevale et al. (2020) found that when LMX quality is high, leaders tend to delegate more decision-making power to employees and support their self-worth, which helps increase employees' sense of control over their own abilities and job satisfaction. Moreover, in empowering employees, leaders play a supportive rather than controlling role, and according to Kalyar et al. (2020), leaders enhance internal team members' self-efficacy by providing more support and training, thereby promoting their contribution to the organization. Studies show that giving internal team members more responsibility and expectations can lead to greater contributions to the organization, which may be seen as increasing their sense of self-determination and influence (Chung & Jeon, 2020). Therefore, based on these findings, this article proposes the following hypothesis:

**H3:** LMX has a negative effects turnover intention.

### 2.4 The Mediating Role of LMX

Work engagement is a key factor for organizational success. High-quality LMX is positively associated with work engagement (Nugraha, 2019). In high-quality LMX, leaders tend to view subordinates as unique individuals and invest time and effort in developing personal and professional relationships with them. This investment in relationships can result in higher levels of trust, respect, and support (Naz, 2019).

Leaders who invest in high-quality LMX relationships often provide their subordinates with more autonomy, recognition, and feedback, which can cultivate a sense of ownership and commitment to their work. As a result, employees are more likely to engage and dedicate themselves to the organization's goals and values. High-

quality LMX also provides a supportive and nurturing environment that encourages employees to learn and grow, thereby improving their skills and abilities, and ultimately, overall leadership effectiveness and creativity. Furthermore, high-quality LMX can establish employees' sense of security and self-identification, enabling them to more actively express their needs and opinions and perform better at work. Leaders who pay attention to subordinates' needs and feelings, and provide timely positive feedback and support, can build trust and respect with subordinates, further enhancing work quality and efficiency. In summary, high-quality LMX is positively correlated with job involvement, which is crucial to organizational success. Investing in high-quality LMX relationships can increase employee satisfaction and commitment, foster a supportive and nurturing environment, and ultimately lead to better overall leadership effectiveness and creativity.

Shen et al. (2017) showed that when LMX exhibits a negative trend, the subordinate's tendency to leave the job also shows a negative trend. Tao (2018) believed that when the subordinate's work involvement increases and job satisfaction increases, the tendency to leave the job is relatively lower. Li et al. (2020) found that LMX has a relative impact on subordinates' tendency to leave the job. According to the study by Reyhanoglu and Akin (2022), there is a negative correlation between leadership behavior and employees' tendency to leave the job. In addition, job satisfaction plays an important mediating and moderating role between leadership behavior and the tendency to leave the job. Kim et al. (2010) pointed out that there is a positive relationship between LMX and job satisfaction, and the exchange relationship between leaders and subordinates (vertical) and the exchange relationship among subordinates (horizontal) have a significant positive impact on job satisfaction. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H4:** LMX plays a mediating role between work engagement and turnover intention

## 2.5 The Moderating Effect of Leadership Support

Studies consistently show that there is a negative correlation between leadership support and turnover intentions. When employees receive support from their leaders, they are more likely to engage and invest in their work, which, in turn, is associated with lower turnover intentions. On the other hand, when employees do not feel supported by their leaders, they may feel disengaged and dissatisfied with their work, which increases their likelihood of leaving the organization (Zaheer et al., 2019).

The study by Eisenbeiss et al. (2008) suggests that leadership support plays a crucial moderating role between job dedication and counterproductive behavior. In situations

with higher leadership support, the relationship between job dedication and counterproductive behavior is stronger. The researchers suggest that this could be because employees are more willing to engage in their work and demonstrate higher job dedication when they feel supported by their leaders. This also makes them more likely to minimize counterproductive behavior. Therefore, leadership support can help reduce counterproductive behavior, improve employee job performance, and enhance organizational effectiveness.

Similarly, Potipiroon and Faerman (2020) found that leadership support moderates the relationship between work engagement and employee counterproductive behavior. They found that in situations with high leadership support, the relationship between work engagement and employee counterproductive behavior is weaker. This suggests that when employees feel supported by their leaders, they are more likely to exhibit higher levels of work engagement, thus reducing the occurrence of employee counterproductive behavior. These studies emphasize the important role of leadership support in influencing employee behavior and organizational performance.

Mumu et al. (2021) found in their study that the higher the level of leader support, the higher the employee job satisfaction and the lower their intention to quit. Judge et al. (2020) suggest that employee satisfaction with job tasks, working conditions, organizational culture, and other aspects reflects their values, personality traits, social and cultural backgrounds, among other factors. Judge et al. (2020) also suggest that job satisfaction can be seen as a general attitude of individuals towards their work. The higher the employee's job satisfaction, the more positive their work attitude. Zhang et al. (2019) reviewed studies on job satisfaction and turnover behavior, finding that most studies support the view that employee job satisfaction helps to reduce their turnover behavior, thus increasing their intention to stay. When employees receive support from their leaders, they feel valued and recognized, which can increase their job satisfaction. In turn, job satisfaction can affect employees' attitudes and behaviors, including their intention to quit. Therefore, this article proposes the following research hypothesis:

**H5:** Leadership support moderates the relationship between work engagement and turnover intention.

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1 Research Model

Social Exchange Theory (SET) posits that workplace relationships are built on the reciprocal exchange of resources and trust (Ahmad et al., 2023). High work

engagement reflects employees' commitment and effort, promoting positive interactions and stronger leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships (Carnevale et al., 2020). These relationships act as mediators by enhancing mutual trust and support, thereby reducing turnover intention. Furthermore, leadership support moderates the relationship between work engagement and turnover intention by amplifying the positive effects of engagement (Zhang et al., 2019). When leaders provide guidance, recognition, and resources, employees feel more valued, strengthening their attachment to the organization and reducing the likelihood of turnover. Based on Social Exchange Theory (SET), this study proposes the following research framework. Figure 1 presents the research framework of this study, which includes 5 hypotheses.

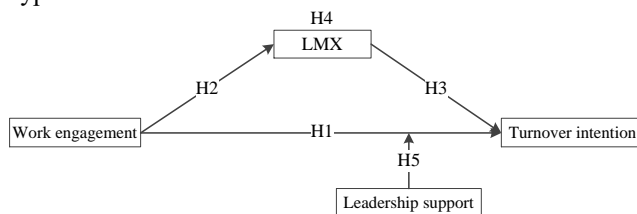


Figure 1: Research Architecture Diagram

### 3.2 Research Tools

According to scholars' recommendations, a Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.7 indicates reliability (Vaske et al., 2017). For model fit indices, a  $\chi^2/df$  value less than 5 is considered acceptable, GFI and CFI values greater than 0.9 are acceptable, AGFI values greater than 0.8 are acceptable, and an RMSEA value less than 0.08 is considered acceptable (Sürücü et al., 2023).

UWES scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2006) was used to evaluate the level of work engagement of catering employees. The scale consists of 17 questions covering three factors: vigor, dedication, and absorption. A Likert five-point scale was used to assess employees' level of work engagement, with higher scores indicating higher levels of work engagement. The  $\alpha$  coefficients for vigor, dedication, and absorption of work engagement were 0.904, 0.893, and 0.848, respectively, and the overall  $\alpha$  coefficient for work engagement was 0.874. The scale passed the tests of reliability and validity, with  $\chi^2/df=4.114$ , GFI=0.941, AGFI=0.926, CFI=0.952, RMSEA=0.053, and PCFI=0.842.

The turnover intention was measured using the scale developed by Mobley (1977). The purpose of this study was to measure respondents' intention to leave and their future career development direction. As turnover intention is a general indicator of whether an employee is likely to leave the company before taking actual action, the questionnaire asked whether employees had the intention to leave the company. The  $\alpha$  coefficient was 0.904,  $\chi^2/df=2.902$ ,

GFI=0.985, AGFI=0.965, CFI=0.989, RMSEA=0.067, and PCFI=0.593. The scale passed the tests of reliability and validity.

The leader-member exchange (LMX) was measured using the original scale developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), consisting of 6 items. A lower score indicates lower quality of LMX, while a higher score indicates higher quality of LMX between leaders and subordinates. The  $\alpha$  coefficient was 0.837,  $\chi^2/df=4.158$ , GFI=0.900, AGFI=0.853, CFI=0.915, RMSEA=0.071, and PCFI=0.735. The reliability and validity of the scale were confirmed.

Leader support was measured using a six-item scale developed by Potipiroon and Faerman (2020), with no reverse items. The scale's alpha coefficient was 0.853,  $\chi^2/df=3.369$ , GFI=0.922, AGFI=0.897, CFI=0.930, RMSEA=0.078, and PCFI=0.798. The scale demonstrated reliability and validity.

### 3.3 Research Object and Sampling Method

The present study focuses on investigating the relationships between work engagement, turnover intention, LMX, and leadership support among employees in the food service industry. Therefore, the study targets food service employees, including front-of-house, waitstaff, kitchen staff, and others. The scope of work options for food service employees is gradually narrowing, which has a significant impact on work engagement and turnover intention in this particular environment. Thus, this study selected Shanghai, a city with a high influx of migrants, as the research area to investigate food service employees in Shanghai.

According to the principle of convenience sampling, the survey mainly targeted the food service workers in Shanghai. Following the suggestion by researcher Liu et al. (2024), a regional study sample requires a sample size of approximately 500 to 1000 people. This questionnaire survey distributed the survey forms through various channels, with a minimum of 500 surveys collected.

This article distributed an online questionnaire to catering service employees in Shanghai in October 2022, and a total of 579 questionnaires were collected. After removing questionnaires with short response times and continuous and consistent answers, 544 valid questionnaires were obtained, with an effective rate of 93.96%. The majority of respondents were female, accounting for 63.4%, and the age was mainly distributed between 31-40 years and 41-50 years, accounting for 37.5% and 34.6%, respectively. The education level was mainly concentrated at the college and high school (inclusive) levels, accounting for 46.1% and 41.2%, respectively. The current work experience was mainly 1-5 years, accounting for 69.3%, indicating a high turnover rate among catering service employees. The position was generally at the grassroots level, accounting for 55.9%, with the remaining

mostly at the grassroots leadership level, accounting for 35.3%. The time working with the current direct supervisor was mainly concentrated within 1-5 years, accounting for 66.3%, followed by less than 1 year, accounting for 24.4%. Therefore, it can be seen that the typical age range of catering industry employees in Shanghai is between 31-50 years, with college degrees or lower, and a relatively short work experience and time working with current direct supervisors. The majority of employees hold grassroots positions, which is similar to the actual portrait of catering industry employees, indicating that the results of this survey are representative.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Correlation Analysis

Table 1 presents the results of Pearson correlation analysis used to examine the associations between two variables. The results indicate that work engagement is significantly negatively correlated with turnover intention ( $r=-0.459$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and significantly positively correlated with LMX ( $r=0.518$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). LMX is significantly negatively correlated with turnover intention ( $r=-0.547$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and leadership support is significantly negatively correlated with turnover intention ( $r=-0.465$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). These findings provide preliminary support for the research hypotheses. The square root of AVE values for each measurement tool is greater than the correlation coefficient between variables. This finding further demonstrates good discriminant validity of the measurement tools used in this study.

### 4.2 Hypothetical Test

When constructing a model that includes both mediator and moderator variables, it is necessary to consider whether the moderator variable has a direct effect on the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. Similarly, when constructing a model that includes both mediator and moderator variables, it is necessary to consider whether the moderator variable has an effect on the direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. To test these models, this study used the SPSS macro-PROCESS developed by Hayes and Preacher (2013). This program uses a bias-corrected percentile

Bootstrap method for analysis and can validate various mediation models that include moderator and mediator variables or moderator effects. Moreover, this program has been widely used in many research fields (Hayes, 2012).

The SPSS 24.0 macro program Process V3.0 was used with 5,000 Bootstrap samples and a confidence interval of 95% to test the mediating and moderating models. The model summary tables are shown in Table 2, with job involvement as X, leader-member exchange as M, turnover intention as Y, and leader support as W. Two models were created, with R-squared values of 0.263 and 0.469, indicating the models explained 26.3% and 46.9% of the variance, respectively. Both F values reached a significant level ( $p<0.001$ ), indicating that the two models were statistically significant (Hayes, 2012).

Table 3 shows that in the regression model, in Model 1, work engagement negatively affects LMX ( $\beta=0.225$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $CI=[0.176, 0.373]$ ), supporting hypothesis H2, hence H2 is supported. In Model 2, the study found that work engagement has a significant negative effect on turnover intention ( $\beta=-0.679$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $CI=[-0.812, -0.546]$ ), supporting hypothesis H1. Meanwhile, LMX has a negative effects turnover intention ( $\beta=-0.090$ ,  $p<0.05$ ,  $CI=[-0.169, -0.060]$ ), which also supports hypothesis H3. However, the interaction effect between work engagement and leader support did not have a significant negative effect on turnover intention ( $\beta=-0.322$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $CI=[0.367, -0.178]$ ), indicating that hypothesis H5 did not receive support.

The results of the moderated mediation analysis using Process Model 5 are presented in Table 4, showing significant moderated mediation effects for both the lower and upper bounds of the confidence interval, indicating that the mediation effect is significant regardless of whether the moderator variable is one standard deviation below or above the mean. Therefore, this study supports Hypothesis 6 that leadership support negatively moderates the relationship between work engagement and turnover intention through LMX.

Using the 5th model of the process macro to test the moderated mediation model, the coefficients of the mediation path were obtained and are presented in Table 5. Among them, the path from work engagement to LMX to turnover intention was significant ( $\beta=-0.069$ ,  $CI=[-0.133, -0.019]$ ), indicating that work engagement can indirectly affect turnover intention through LMX, supporting hypothesis H4.

**Table 1:** Correlation Analysis and Discriminant Validity

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Work engagement	3.768	0.510	0.734			
2. LMX	3.678	0.784	0.518**	0.865		
3. Leadership support	3.860	0.749	0.460**	0.569**	0.778	
4. Turnover intention	3.869	0.860	-0.459**	-0.547**	-0.465**	0.785

Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; the diagonal line is the square root value of AVE

**Table 2:** Summary of Process Regression Model

Model	DV	R	R-sq	MSE	F	p
1	M	0.263	0.169	0.842	82.199	0.000
2	Y	0.469	0.320	0.949	77.724	0.000

Note: M=LMX; Y=Turnover intention

**Table 3:** Analysis of Process Regression Model

Model	Explanatory variables	$\beta$	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
1	Constant	2.817	0.099	28.296	0.000	2.619	3.009
	Work Engagement	0.225	0.025	9.066	0.000	0.176	0.373
2	Constant	0.091	0.302	0.299	0.764	-0.504	0.684
	Work Engagement	-0.679	0.085	-7.991	0.000	-0.812	-0.546
	LMX	-0.090	0.036	-2.517	0.012	-0.169	-0.060
	Leadership Support	-0.201	0.089	-7.854	0.000	-0.826	-0.476
	Work Engagement $\times$ Leadership Support	-0.322	0.023	-5.410	0.000	-0.367	-0.178

Note: M=LMX; Y=Turnover intention

**Table 4:** Mediation Effect of Work Engagement Across Leadership Support Levels

Moderator	$\beta$	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-SD	-0.188	0.038	4.948	0.000	-0.262	-0.113
-	-0.221	0.028	-7.836	0.000	-0.276	-0.165
+ SD	-0.254	0.033	-7.776	0.000	-0.318	-0.189

**Table 5:** Mediation Effect Test Summary

Intermediary path	$\beta$	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Work engagement $\rightarrow$ LMX $\rightarrow$ turnover intention	-0.069	0.019	-0.133	-0.019

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1 Conclusion

The empirical analysis in this paper found that job involvement positively affects LMX, similar to the research conclusions of scholars Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), Kalyar et al. (2020), Naz (2019), and Park et al. (2019). That is, the higher the employee's job involvement, the higher the degree of LMX they will experience. LMX negatively affects turnover intention, similar to the research conclusions of scholars Carnevale et al. (2020), Kalyar et al. (2020), Chung

and Jeon (2020). LMX has a mediating effect between job involvement and turnover intention, similar to the research conclusions of scholars Shen et al. (2017), Tao (2018), Li et al. (2020), Reyhanoglu and Akin (2022), and Kim et al. (2010). That is, job involvement can indirectly affect turnover intention through LMX. Leader support has a moderating effect between job involvement and turnover intention, similar to the research results of scholars Mumu et al. (2021), Zhang et al. (2019), and Judge et al. (2020).

## 5.2 Significance

The turnover rate of catering employees is relatively high, especially in the past three years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the downturn in the catering industry, which has led to job transitions among related groups. This paper provides reference suggestions for organizations to effectively reduce employee turnover by studying the conclusions. Establishing effective communication mechanisms and providing support to increase employee engagement is one of the important responsibilities of organizational leadership.

This study employs social exchange theory. In this study, we aim to establish a theoretical model to explore the relationship between employees and organizations, with work engagement as an explanatory factor, LMX as an intermediate factor, leadership support as an interfering factor, and turnover intention as a dependent variable. We investigate the impact of positive individual and organizational factors on the negative variable of turnover intention, by constructing a cross-level model and filling the research gap in turnover intention studies, thereby enriching related theoretical research.

## 5.3 Research Innovation

This study addressed the shortcomings of research on the relationship between job involvement and turnover intention. Previous research has demonstrated the impact of job involvement on turnover intention, and this study explored the mechanisms underlying this relationship. Prior research has primarily focused on the discussion of job involvement and turnover intention from a top-down perspective. In contrast, this study takes a dyadic leader-member exchange (LMX) perspective to clarify the deeper mechanisms of employee turnover intention. Although research in this field has examined the outcome variables of job involvement, there has been relatively little empirical research on turnover intention under different leader-member relationships, the specific operational mechanisms of job involvement and turnover intention, and whether leadership support can enhance the negative relationship between job involvement and turnover intention.

This study constructed a direct, mediating, and moderating system of the effects of employee job involvement, turnover intention, LMX, and leadership support in the restaurant industry in China, and explored the path of the effect of employee job involvement on turnover intention. The research findings enriched the related theories of job involvement, LMX, leadership support, and turnover intention. Based on social exchange theory, this study focused on the relationship between job involvement and turnover intention under different supervisor-subordinate relationships.

## 5.4 Recommendation

Organizations can reduce turnover intention by enhancing employee engagement, fostering high-quality leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships, strengthening leadership support, implementing effective feedback mechanisms, and developing tailored retention strategies. To boost engagement, companies should offer professional development programs, recognize employee achievements, and create career advancement opportunities, building stronger emotional connections with their roles. Leadership training should focus on improving communication and interpersonal skills to cultivate high-quality LMX relationships, which enhance trust, respect, and support between leaders and employees. Encouraging leaders to provide guidance, resources, and recognition amplifies the positive effects of work engagement and fosters a supportive work environment. Regular feedback sessions can address potential issues early, improve LMX quality, and promote open communication. Additionally, considering the high turnover rates in the catering industry, organizations should implement industry-specific strategies, such as flexible scheduling, competitive compensation, and wellness programs, to retain talent effectively.

## 5.5 Limitations for Further Study

This study has several limitations that provide avenues for future research. First, its findings are limited to catering employees in Shanghai, China, raising questions about generalizability across different industries, regions, and cultural contexts. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences, suggesting that longitudinal studies could better capture the dynamic relationships between work engagement, LMX, leadership support, and turnover intention. Third, reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, such as social desirability bias, highlighting the need for objective performance measures or third-party evaluations in future studies. Additionally, the scope of moderators examined was limited to leadership support, leaving unexplored variables like organizational culture, employee personality traits, and external economic factors. The focus on grassroots employees further narrows the applicability of the findings, necessitating research on managerial employees to identify potential differences in patterns. Lastly, the study's timing during the post-COVID-19 period may have influenced turnover intentions due to economic uncertainties, warranting future research to control for external factors to better isolate the effects of the variables.

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