

Cultural effects over turnover intentions

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Abstract: TEmployee turnover remains a critical concern for organizations, particularly in post-pandemic contexts marked by increased stress and blurred work-life boundaries. This study explores the psychological and cultural determinants of turnover intentions among Romanian employees, with a focus on job satisfaction, stress, organizational commitment, and perceived organizational cultural tightness-looseness (CTL). Using a quantitative approach, data were collected via an online survey from 197 participants employed in organizations with at least three staff members. Structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), robust regression, and exploratory factor analysis were employed to test both direct and mediating effects. Findings confirmed that job satisfaction and organizational commitment significantly and negatively predict turnover intentions, while stress has a significant positive effect. However, contrary to expectations, CTL did not significantly predict turnover intentions, nor did it mediate the effects of stress or satisfaction. These results suggest that CTL may shape employee attitudes but not necessarily behavioral intentions. Cluster analysis further identified vulnerable profiles, such as early-career employees with low satisfaction and high stress. The study contributes to behavioral research by applying CTL in an under-explored regional context and offers practical insights for designing retention interventions. Implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

Key words: Cultural Tightness-Looseness, Organizational Culture, Turnover Intentions, Job Satisfaction, Stress, Organizational Commitment

JEL: J63, M14, Z19

1. Introduction

In an increasingly competitive global economy, work has become a central part of human identity and social life. Working hours have increased post-pandemic, and hybrid work has blurred the lines between professional and personal life, increasing expectations of constant availability (Clockify, 2025).

Within this context, it is no surprise that the World Health Organization defined stress as the health epidemic of the century (Alight, n.d.). In Romania, MedLife (2013) reports that 63.8% of Romanians consider themselves stressed, and Digi24 (2019) found that 98% suffer from chronic stress, with work being the main factor for 78% of them.

Voluntary turnover becomes a symptom of the imbalance between workplace demands and employee well-being. Turnover has both direct (recruitment, training) and indirect (productivity, morale) costs (Cockett, 2024; Reeves, 2024). Given the global and local urgency of the topic, understanding the organizational and psychological factors influencing turnover is of strategic importance.

2. Literature review

Although actual turnover behavior is difficult to track, turnover intentions are a widely accepted proxy (Limbocker & Richardson, 2023), particularly useful in cross-sectional designs.

Job satisfaction has a consistent negative relationship with turnover intentions. Meta-analyses (e.g., Ozkan et al., 2020) report effect sizes around $r = -0.52$, indicating that more satisfied employees are less likely to consider leaving.

H1: Job Satisfaction significantly and negatively affects turnover intentions.

Stress is another robust predictor. Kim & Kim (2021) found an average effect size of $r = 0.39$ across multiple studies, suggesting that higher stress is associated with stronger turnover intentions.

H2: Stress significantly and positively affects turnover intentions.

Organizational commitment reflects employees' psychological attachment to their workplace. Studies show it has one of the strongest negative correlations with turnover intentions (Kim & Kao, 2014; $r = -0.54$).

H3: Organizational commitment significantly and negatively affects turnover intentions.

While job satisfaction, stress, and commitment have been well studied, organizational culture remains a less explored predictor - particularly its tightness-looseness dimension. Cultural tightness-looseness (CTL) refers to the degree to which social norms are clearly defined and strongly enforced (Gelfand et al., 2011). Tighter cultures promote uniform behavior, while looser ones allow greater individual autonomy (Triandis, 1989).

In organizational settings, CTL has been linked to job satisfaction, commitment, and even turnover (Di Santo et al., 2021). This study adopts CTL as a perception-based cultural factor within organizations.

H4: Perceived organizational cultural tightness significantly and negatively affects turnover intentions.

Beyond direct effects, CTL may mediate the relationship between attitudinal predictors and turnover. A tight organizational culture may buffer the effects of low satisfaction or high stress by providing structure and clarity - or the other way around, it could amplify these effects if it becomes too rigid.

H5: CTL mediates the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

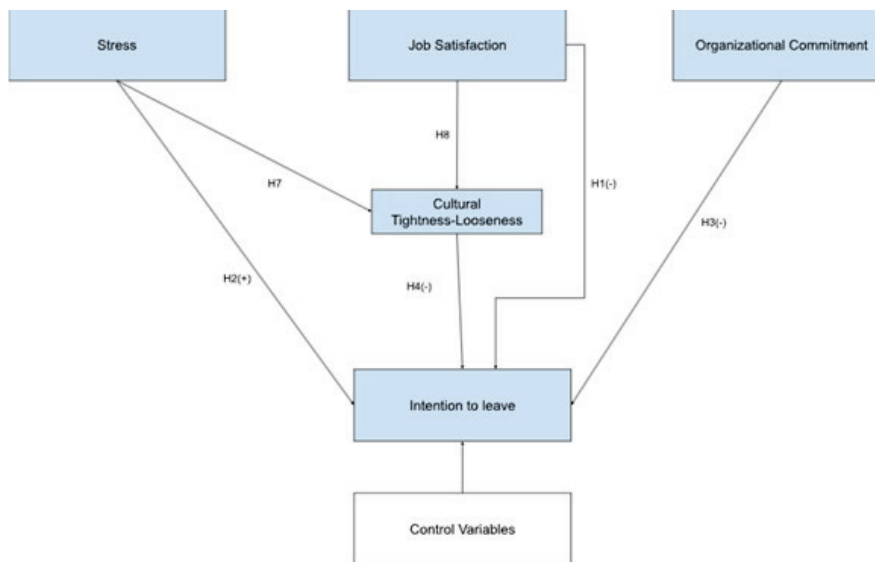
H6: CTL mediates the relationship between stress and turnover intentions.

H7: Job satisfaction significantly affects perceived CTL.

H8: Stress significantly affects perceived CTL.

To account for individual differences, control variables such as age, gender, tenure, and salary were also included based on prior literature (Ono, 2023; De Meulenaere et al., 2022; Febriani et al., 2024; Kamau et al., 2021; Soeprapto et al., 2024; Siregar & Maryati, 2020; Mihajlov & Mihajlov, 2016; Bangi & Mgeni, 2022) though their effects are expected to be minimal once stronger predictors are accounted for (Hur & Abner, 2023). And so, the proposed conceptual model is the following:

Figure 1: Conceptual model



Source: Author's own research

3. Research methodology

In order to test the proposed hypotheses, an online survey was distributed using social media (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Reddit) during January and February of 2025. Respondents were notified beforehand of the voluntary and anonymous nature of the study, as well as the academic purpose of the data collection. In order to proceed to the questions, they had to explicitly agree to the stated terms. Participants did not receive any form of compensation for completing the survey.

The dissemination followed a convenience and snowball sampling strategy (Nikolopoulou, 2022; Oregon State University, 2010), resulting in 210 responses, out of which 197 were valid—meaning the respondents worked in organizations with at least three employees, since organizational culture is understood as a phenomenon that requires a group context (Ritzer, 2010). This sample size is consistent with a 95% confidence level and 7% margin of error as calculated using Calculator.net.

The survey included translated and adapted questions based on Di Santo et al. (2021) for perceived organizational tightness, Mobley (1977) for turnover intentions, Brayfield & Rothe (1951) for job satisfaction, Meyer et al. (1993) for organizational commitment and Cohen et al. (1983) for stress. Additionally, a short-form social desirability scale was included for answer cross-validation, alongside demographic questions covering gender, age, education, job tenure, income, and sector.

Constructs for the variables of interest used 6-point scale Likert-type items, while the social desirability scale had a True/False response pattern. The reliability of all scales was assessed and confirmed via Composite Reliability, Cronbach's Alpha, and AVE, all above acceptable thresholds, further discussed in Chapter 4.

4. Results and discussions

This study set out to examine how organizational factors—including job satisfaction, stress, organizational commitment, and perceived cultural tightness—interact to influence turnover intentions in a Romanian context. The findings confirmed several well-established relationships, while offering unexpected results regarding cultural tightness-looseness (CTL).

Turnover intentions were generally low in the sample, with all three items averaging below 3 on a 6-point scale. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment levels were moderate, while stress scores were slightly lower overall, though standard deviations suggest considerable variability. Perceived cultural tightness showed some polarization: items referencing formal rules and procedures scored higher, while reversed items describing flexibility scored lower.

Correlation analysis revealed that turnover intentions were negatively associated with job satisfaction ($r = -0.78$) and organizational commitment ($r = -0.70$), while positively associated with stress ($r = 0.58$). The correlation between turnover intentions and CTL was weak and negative ($r = -0.12$). CTL showed small positive correlations with job satisfaction and organizational commitment but no meaningful relationship with stress.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix between variables of interest

	CTL	TO	OC	JS
TO	-0.12			
OC	0.21	-0.7		
JS	0.22	-0.78	0.71	
S	-0.03	0.58	-0.4	-0.59

Source: Author's own research

As hypothesized, job satisfaction and organizational commitment significantly and negatively predicted turnover intentions, while stress showed a significant positive effect. These results are in line with existing literature and strengthen the evidence base for these variables as strong behavioral predictors in the workplace.

The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) confirmed the unidimensionality of the CTL scale. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.741, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 183.17$, $p < .001$). Although the Scree Plot hinted at a two-factor structure, the factor loadings did not support this, and parallel analysis retained only one factor.

The robust regression models confirmed several hypotheses. Job satisfaction significantly and negatively predicted turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.44$, $p < .001$), as did organizational commitment ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < .001$). Stress was found to significantly and positively predict turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < .001$). In contrast, CTL did not significantly affect turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.01$, $p = .43$). The included control variables showed no significant influence.

Table 2: The coefficients of robust linear regressions

	Turnover Intentions	Organizational Commitment	Stress	Job Satisfaction
Const	3.46*** (0.000)	2.35*** (0.001)	2.98*** (0.000)	2.82*** (0.000)
CTL	-0.14 (0.344)	0.27* (0.043)	-0.01 (0.923)	0.38** (0.001)
Age	-0.27* (0.047)	0.24 (0.059)	-0.3** (0.006)	0.17 (0.129)
Education	0.15 (0.202)	-0.06 (0.546)	0.08 (0.385)	-0.1 (0.282)
Tenure	-0.03 (0.713)	0.19* (0.017)	0.02 (0.782)	0.04 (0.609)
Salary	-0.1 (0.239)	-0.04 (0.554)	-0.1 (0.152)	0.06 (0.406)
Gender	0.02 (0.948)	0.21 (0.326)	0.45** (0.015)	-0.31 (0.095)

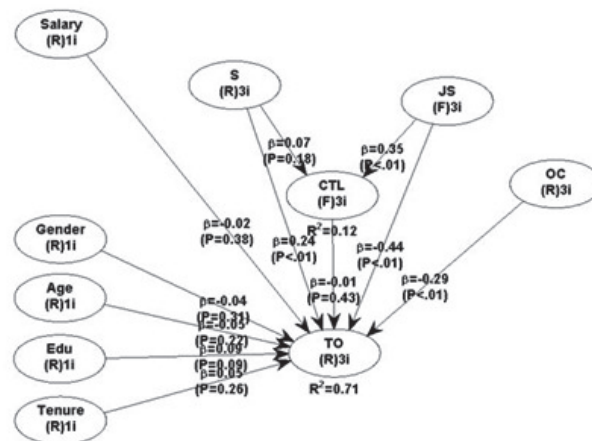
*** p-value < 0.001; ** p-value < 0.01; * p-value < 0.05

Source: Author's own research

Contrary to expectations, perceived organizational cultural tightness did not significantly affect turnover intentions and did not mediate the relationships between either job satisfaction or stress and turnover intentions. So, the findings of MacIntosh & Doherty (2010), Faeq & Ismael (2022) and Misoles et al. (2023) about the significant role of mediation of organizational culture do not hold with the tightness-looseness facet considered. This may be explained by the Romanian organizational setting or by the generational aspect of the sample. The findings also differ from Di Santo et al.'s (2021): while CTL was positively related to job satisfaction and commitment, it had no meaningful impact on stress or on whether employees planned to leave their organizations.

The structural equation model (PLS-SEM) explained 71% of the variance in turnover intentions ($R^2 = 0.71$). In this model, CTL was significantly predicted by job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .01$), but not by stress ($\beta = 0.07$, $p = .18$). Additionally, CTL did not significantly mediate the relationship between either stress or job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

Figure 2: Conceptual Model with results



Source: Author's own research

These findings suggest that CTL may be more relevant to attitudes (like satisfaction and commitment) than behaviors (like turnover intentions). Moreover, in high-stress environments, strict organizational norms may be perceived differently—either as support structures or as sources of additional pressure—potentially explaining the non-significant results.

Table 3 shows three different measures for reliability of the scales and latent variables in this research. Composite reliability over 0.7 indicates internally consistent measurements. In this case, all values are over 0.85, showing a high reliability. Cronbach's alpha over 0.8 for established scales and 0.7 otherwise summarize the correlation of the items within a construct. Once again, the latent variables in this study pass these thresholds, with all but CTL being established scales. Finally, the limit for Average Variance Extracted (0.5) is once again surpassed by far for all constructs suggesting that a large proportion of variance is captured by the construct itself rather than by error.

Table 4 shows the discriminant validity of the measurements which is confirmed if the diagonal values are higher than their corresponding non-diagonals. For example, CTL has correlations of -0.191 (TO), 0.3 (JS), -0.062 (S), and 0.304 (OC) which are lower than the square root of AVE = 0.824. This is the case for all variables of interest, so it can be concluded that the validity of our constructs holds.

Table 3: Measures of reliability

Variables	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's alpha	Average Variance Extracted
Perceived organizational cultural tightness	0.863	0.762	0.678
Intention to turnover	0.912	0.855	0.775
Stress	0.914	0.859	0.781
Organizational Commitment	0.923	0.875	0.801
Job Satisfaction	0.901	0.833	0.752

Source: Author's own research

Table 4: Discriminant validity: correlations among latent variables with square roots of AVEs

Variable	CTL	TO	JS	S	OC
CTL	0.824	-0.191	0.3	-0.062	0.304
TO	-0.191	0.88	-0.776	0.579	-0.693
JS	0.3	-0.776	0.867	-0.556	0.725
S	-0.062	0.579	-0.556	0.884	-0.37
OC	0.304	-0.693	0.725	-0.37	0.895

Source: Author's own research

Moreover, in Table 5 there are the combined loadings and cross-loadings, with which we can further confirm this validity if combined loadings are over 0.7, while cross-loadings are more than 0.1 lower, which can be seen as the case for all constructs.

Table 5: Combined Loadings and Cross-loadings

	CTL	TO	JS	S	OC		CTL	TO	JS	S	OC
CTL1	0.788	-0.206	-0.25	0.034	0.217	JS3	-0.009	-0.109	0.894	-0.018	0.314
CTL4	0.852	0.179	0.127	-0.1	-0.102	S1	-0.009	-0.099	0.01	0.871	-0.117
CTL6	0.829	0.012	0.108	0.071	-0.101	S2	-0.048	-0.017	-0.092	0.897	0.037
TO1	-0.098	0.887	0.012	0.254	-0.07	S3	0.058	0.115	0.085	0.882	0.078
TO2	0.039	0.877	0.24	-0.067	0.161	OC1	0.11	-0.041	-0.046	0.011	0.931
TO3	0.061	0.877	-0.252	-0.189	-0.09	OC2	-0.033	-0.108	0.09	-0.004	0.859
JS1	0.026	-0.213	0.925	-0.076	0.112	OC3	-0.083	0.147	-0.038	-0.008	0.894
JS2	-0.021	0.379	0.776	0.111	-0.494						

Source: Author's own research

Table 6: The coefficients of the structural model

Variable	Direct Effects		Indirect Effects	Total Effects
	CTL	TO	TO	TO
CTL	-	-0.01 (0.432)	-	-0.01 (0.432)
JS	0.354*** (<0.001)	-0.44*** (<0.001)	-0.004 (0.466)	-0.443*** (<0.001)
S	0.065 (0.177)	0.239*** (<0.001)	-0.001 (0.494)	0.238*** (<0.001)
OC	-	-0.293*** (<0.001)	-	-0.293*** (<0.001)
Age	-	-0.05 (0.222)	-	-0.05 (0.222)
Gender				
Male	-	Reference	-	Reference
Female		-0.035 (0.309)		-0.035 (0.309)
Education	-	0.092 (0.093)	-	0.092 (0.093)
Tenure	-	0.046 (0.256)	-	0.046 (0.256)
Salary	-	-0.02 (0.381)	-	-0.02 (0.381)
R ² /Adj R ²	12% / 11%	71% / 69%	-	-

Source: Author's own research

Moving on to the resulting coefficients, only a few paths are actually significant, namely Job Satisfaction's direct effects on Perceived Organizational Cultural Tightness and Turnover Intention, plus the direct effects of Stress and Organizational Commitment on Turnover intentions. None of the control variables proved to be significant under the assumption of a linear relationship. Once again, it can be seen that the overall explanatory power of this model is, however, very high, with over 70% of the variation in turnover intentions being explained by it.

The strongest effects showcased in this sample are the effect of Job Satisfaction over Turnover Intentions, the moderate effect of Organizational Commitment over Turnover Intention, and with pretty similar values: Job Satisfaction over Perceived Organizational Cultural Tightness and Stress over Turnover Intention.

Table 7: Effect sizes of direct effects

Variable	Effect Sizes of Direct Effects	
	CTL	TO
CTL	-	0.003
JS	0.136	0.347
S	0.014	0.139
OC	-	0.205
Age	-	0.013
Gender	-	0.001
Education	-	0.014
Tenure	-	0.013
Salary	-	0.003

Source: Author's own research

A k-means cluster analysis ($k = 2$) revealed two distinct employee profiles. The first group, labeled "Veterans," was characterized by high satisfaction, low stress, and low turnover intentions. The second group, labeled "Newcomers," reported high stress, low satisfaction, and moderate to high turnover intentions. ANOVA confirmed statistically significant group differences across all key variables ($p < .001$). The practical implications of this research are particularly relevant for early-career employee retention. Using the Behaviour Change Wheel (BCW) and COM-B model, practical interventions could target these employees through stress management training (capability), mentorship or buddy programs (opportunity), and incentives for tenure and performance (motivation).

Theoretically, the study contributes by integrating CTL into a behavioral economic and organizational framework in a national context that is underrepresented in the literature. It also highlights the role of social desirability bias as a potential underlying factor in self-reported satisfaction and stress, aligning with perspectives from behavioral science on bounded rationality and norm-adherence.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. The use of convenience and snowball sampling limits generalizability, and the sample was heavily skewed toward younger, early-career employees. Additionally, although the CTL scale showed acceptable reliability overall, some reverse-coded items presented weaker factor loadings, potentially affecting construct validity.

Future research should refine the measurement of CTL, possibly adapting it better to non-Western cultural contexts. Varied approaches, including interviews, could offer deeper insights into how employees perceive cultural norms and how those perceptions shape behavior. Further exploration of actual turnover rather than intentions could also yield valuable insights. Finally, exploring CTL as a moderator—rather than only a mediator—may unlock new understanding of how culture shapes workplace behavior.

5. Conclusions

This study explored how psychological and cultural organizational factors influence turnover intentions among Romanian employees, with a focus on job satisfaction, stress, organizational commitment, and perceived cultural tightness-looseness (CTL). The results confirmed that job satisfaction and organizational commitment significantly reduce turnover intentions, while stress increases them—reinforcing well-established findings in the literature.

Unexpectedly, perceived organizational CTL did not have a direct or mediating effect on turnover intentions. While it was positively associated with job satisfaction and commitment, its role appears to be more attitudinal than behavioral in this context. These findings suggest that in high-stress environments, rigid norms may not necessarily discourage turnover but may instead be perceived as burdensome or irrelevant to coping mechanisms.

The study provides both theoretical and practical value by applying CTL in an underrepresented national setting and identifying vulnerable employee profiles through cluster analysis. These insights offer a basis for targeted interventions to reduce early-career turnover. Future research could explore CTL in longitudinal designs or consider it as a moderating factor, while refining its measurement across cultural contexts.

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