

# The Effect Mechanism of Workplace Loneliness on Employee Turnover Intention

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## ABSTRACT

Based on the social motivation theory, this paper explores the reasons for the high dimission rate of front-line employees. Through a questionnaire survey of 432 front-line employees of J Company, the research finds that: Workplace loneliness has a positive effect on turnover intention, and occupational toughness has a negative effect on turnover intention, and affective toughness and cognitive toughness have a negative moderating effect on the relationship between workplace loneliness and turnover intention.

**Keywords:** Workplace loneliness, Career toughness, Turnover intention

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, with the diversified development of social economy and a large number of post-90s and post-00s graduates entering enterprises, the dimission rate of employees in Chinese enterprises is gradually rising due to the impact of the epidemic. Therefore, how to reduce the dimission behavior of employees is an important problem that urgently has to be solved by enterprises. The dimission behavior of employees is often due to the employee's dimission tendency <sup>[1]</sup>. Throughout the existing studies in the academic world, Scholars' exploration of the antecedents of corporate employees' turnover tendencies mostly focus on factors such as corporate salaries and benefits, performance appraisal systems, development space, corporate culture, leadership styles, and employee values <sup>[2]</sup>, but there are few researches on employees' dimission tendency from the perspective of employees' emotional experience in the workplace. In today's complex and changeable organizational environment with fierce competition, the workplace emotion of organizational members has a significant impact on their professional behavior, job satisfaction and even job burnout <sup>[3]</sup>, and may also lead to dimission tendency or dimission behavior of organizational members. In addition, the country has been emphasizing people-oriented and scientific development in recent years. One of the basic principles

of people-oriented is to attach importance to human needs <sup>[4]</sup>. Human beings are emotional animals with social attributes, and they have both economic needs and emotional needs, which are equally important <sup>[5]</sup>. In today's competitive and stressful workplace environment, employees need emotional comfort. Therefore, from the perspective of improving employees' emotional experience in the workplace and satisfying employees' emotional needs, thinking about how to improve organization-employee relationship and reduce employees' turnover tendency is also the embodiment of enterprises' practice of the concept of scientific development.

Front-line employees of COMPANY J generally work in remote power plants with poor working environment for a long time, which makes it difficult for them to get sufficient family interaction and experience. In addition, the weak interpersonal emotional atmosphere and the lack of humanistic care concept at the grass-roots level of COMPANY J lead to a negative workplace psychological feeling - workplace loneliness. This kind of lonely experience makes front-line employees lack the sense of identity and belonging to the unit <sup>[6]</sup>, which may lead to the idea of escaping from the current job to find a more ideal job, that is, turnover tendency. At this point, it is particularly important for employees to have career toughness, which is the ability of individuals to adapt and self-adjust in the face of constantly changing and even

bad workplace environment<sup>[9]</sup>. In today's era of change, the organization's internal environment is impacted by external factors and often become more volatile, complex, organizations tend to adopt structural change and a series of measures such as process optimization to improve organizational flexibility and competitiveness to adapt to the new market environment, to seek survival and development<sup>[10]</sup>, this also gives members of the organization has brought no small impact. Under such circumstances, some scholars suggest that enterprises, society and employees should make joint efforts to form a comprehensive support system to help employees cultivate and improve their career toughness to adapt to today's changing new workplace environment full of setbacks and challenges<sup>[11]</sup>. Deduce to the employee dismissal situation concerned in this paper. On the one hand, career toughness itself may help employees overcome many challenges and dilemmas in the workplace, thus directly reducing employees' turnover tendency. On the other hand, it can also help those employees with workplace loneliness to enhance their confidence in overcoming workplace setbacks and improve their self-regulation and adaptability, thus indirectly alleviating the negative impact of workplace loneliness on turnover intention.

In conclusion, this paper starts with the negative workplace emotional experience (workplace loneliness) and the positive workplace adaptability (career toughness) of employees to explore the mechanism of the effect of workplace loneliness and career toughness on turnover tendency of front-line employees, and on this basis, puts forward improvement suggestions to reduce turnover tendency of front-line employees.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS**

### ***2.1. Workplace Loneliness and Turnover Intention***

Workplace loneliness refers to the loneliness caused by the quantity or quality gap between the desired and the actual workplace interpersonal relationship, but the individual is unable to make up the gap<sup>[12]</sup>. This paper adopts MAO Chonglin's classification of workplace loneliness, which is more consistent with the corporate culture background of China, and divides workplace loneliness into interpersonal loneliness and existential loneliness<sup>[13]</sup>. Interpersonal loneliness refers to the lack of high quality interpersonal communication in the organization, which leads to the feeling of interpersonal alienation. The existential loneliness refers to the feeling that they are ignored by their colleagues and their work is worthless, so they doubt that they have no value in the organization. Turnover tendency is the willingness to actively leave the organization after the employee's needs are not met, resulting in negative perceptions such

as disappointment, dissatisfaction or psychological gap<sup>[7]</sup>. According to the hypothesis of "social man", people not only hope to meet the needs of economic interests, but also more importantly, hope to meet the needs of emotion and society. Therefore, it is very important to establish good interpersonal relationships in the organization. If the organization's management ignores employees' interpersonal adjustment, it will lead to emotional distance between employees or between employees and organization, and workplace loneliness, as a result of workplace interpersonal alienation, is not conducive to the establishment of good interpersonal relationships among organizational members, the workplace loneliness is higher, the more can reduce the individual sense of belonging to the organization, Individuals' willingness to stay in the organization will also weaken<sup>[15]</sup>.

Based on this, this paper expects that workplace loneliness will induce employees' turnover intention. Specifically: when employees have too few or low quality interpersonal relationships, and employees' emotional needs are deprived or unmet, employees' interpersonal loneliness is likely to eventually lead to their tendency to leave. After employees with a low sense of social identity are marginalized by the organization to which they belong, employees will dissociate from the interpersonal network of the organization and gradually lose their sense of belonging and role identity to the organization. The resulting lack of long-term organizational membership may lead to make employees feel that they have no value to continue to exist, so the existential loneliness of employees is also likely to trigger their turnover intention. To sum up, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Workplace loneliness has a positive effect on turnover intention.

H1a: Interpersonal loneliness has a positive effect on turnover intention.

H1b: Existential loneliness has a positive effect on turnover intention.

### ***2.2. Career Toughness and Turnover Intention***

According to Manuel London's occupational motivation theory, career toughness is an individual's ability to adapt and self-adjust in the face of constantly changing and even bad workplace environment<sup>[8]</sup>. It maintains the occupational motivation of employees and has a positive impact on their optimistic career decisions and behaviors. The higher the level of career toughness is, the more favorable it is for employees to form good career motivation, and less likely to produce negative career decisions such as turnover intention.

Accordingly, this paper expects that employees' career toughness will help to restrain employees' turnover

intention. In this paper, referring to the mature career toughness dimensions of employees in domestic enterprises, career toughness is divided into three dimensions: cognition, emotion and behavior [16]. When employees have strong adaptability and self-efficacy under workplace adversity, employees can perform better. Maintain good career motivation and are less likely to generate negative career decisions such as turnover intentions. Therefore, the emotional toughness represented by employees' professional enthusiasm and cooperative awareness in workplace adversity, the cognitive toughness represented by adaptability and self-efficacy in response to workplace adversity, and the behavioral toughness represented by long-term orientation and willingness to learn in workplace adversity may all have an inhibitory effect on employees' turnover intention.

In summary, this paper proposes the following assumptions:

H2: Career toughness has a negative impact on turnover intention.

H2a: Emotional toughness has a negative effect on turnover intention.

H2b: Cognitive toughness has a negative effect on turnover intention.

H2c: Behavioral toughness has a negative effect on turnover intention.

### 2.3. The Moderating Effect of Career Toughness on Workplace Loneliness and Turnover Intention

Occupational toughness is a positive personal quality that can reduce the impact of workplace exclusion on turnover intention, that is, occupational toughness plays a negative moderating role between workplace rejection and turnover intention [17]. Specifically: employees with high emotional toughness, even in the face of workplace adversity, still have undiminished professional enthusiasm and sense of cooperation, and are likely to spontaneously suppress workplace loneliness in order to maintain team stability, such as interpersonal alienation or workplace absence. The process of turnover intention; employees with high cognitive toughness often have strong workplace adaptability and self-efficacy, and can adjust their work status in time to adapt to the current workplace environment, and spontaneously restrain employees from causing turnover intentions caused by negative workplace emotions; Employees with high behavioral toughness generally have good career orientation, strong willingness to learn, clear career planning and development goals, and are more willing to continue learning and progress in order to achieve career goals, even if they may be affected by workplace alienation or lack of presence. However, for their own

career development goals, they often choose to actively restrain this process.

In summary, this paper proposes the following assumptions:

H3: Occupational toughness plays a negative moderating role between workplace loneliness and turnover intention.

H3a: Emotional toughness negatively moderates the relationship between workplace loneliness and turnover intention.

H3b: Cognitive toughness plays a negative moderating role between workplace loneliness and turnover intention.

H3c: Behavioral toughness plays a negative moderating role between workplace loneliness and turnover intention.

Based on the above research assumptions, the theoretical model of this research is shown in Figure 1.

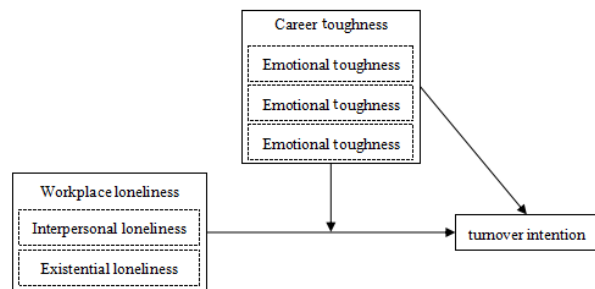


Figure 1. Theoretical model

## 3. RESEARCH METHODS

### 3.1. Scale Design

The variables were measured using domestic and foreign mature scales. The turnover intention scale adopts the localized turnover intention scale developed by Fan Jingli [18], which has high internal consistency and test-retest reliability, and has a total of 4 items. The scale of workplace loneliness originates from Mao Chonglin's research [19]. The scale design starts from two dimensions of existential loneliness and interpersonal loneliness, with a total of 10 items. The scale of occupational toughness selected Song Guoxue's research [20], designed from three dimensions of cognition, emotion and behavior, with a total of 25 items. In view of the fact that the research variables may be affected by demographic variables, this paper selects four demographic variables of age, education, length of service, and rank/position as control variables to carry out the study, and all items use the Likert 5-point scale.

### 3.2. Data Collection

This paper takes the work of the front-line employees of J Company as the survey object, and collects survey data by sending the survey webpage link to the colleagues WeChat group and QQ group, including most ordinary employees and a small number of team leaders, technicians, and technicians in the grass-roots team of J Company. Wait. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed initially, and 469 questionnaires were finally recovered, with a questionnaire recovery rate of 93.8%. After excluding 37 invalid questionnaires with incomplete information, all the same as options and non-front-line employees, 432 valid questionnaires were obtained, with an effective recovery rate of 86.4%.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Workplace loneliness ( $r=0.607$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) was significantly positively correlated with turnover intention, among which interpersonal loneliness ( $r=0.633$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and existential loneliness ( $r=0.539$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) were both associated with turnover intention tend to be positively correlated. Occupational toughness ( $r=-0.562$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) was significantly negatively correlated with turnover intention, among which emotional toughness ( $r=-0.612$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), cognitive toughness ( $r=-0.599$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), behavioral toughness ( $r=-0.535$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) were significantly negatively correlated with turnover intention. There was no significant correlation between each dimension of workplace loneliness and each dimension of occupational toughness ( $p>0.05$ ). It provides an effective premise for subsequent hypothesis testing.

### 4.2. Reliability and Validity Analysis

The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients of all variables in this paper are greater than 0.8, among which: the  $\alpha$  coefficient of turnover intention is 0.854, the  $\alpha$  coefficient of workplace loneliness is 0.892, and the  $\alpha$  coefficient of occupational toughness is 0.846, indicating that the reliability of the scale is relatively reliable. In terms of construct validity, the cumulative explained variance of each construct is above 70%, indicating that the structure of each construct factor is clear. The KMO values of all variables were greater than 0.8 and the significance of the

Bartlett test was 0.00, indicating that the scale had good structural validity.

### 4.3. Common Method Bias Test

In this paper, Harman's single factor test was used to test the possible common method bias in the research process. A total of 6 component factors with an initial eigenvalue greater than 1 were extracted from the principal component analysis (the component factors with an initial eigenvalue less than 1 have been omitted), which explained a total of 69.633% of the total variance; among them, the variance explained scale of the first factor is 24.450%, less than 30%, indicating that the problem of common method bias in this paper is not serious.

### 4.4. Hypothetical Test

#### 4.4.1. Direct Effect Test

As shown in Table 1, M1 only uses interpersonal loneliness as an independent variable, and turnover intention as a dependent variable into the linear regression analysis. The test finds that interpersonal loneliness has a significant positive impact on turnover intention. ( $\beta=0.386$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), validating H1a; as shown in M2, existential loneliness had a significant positive effect on turnover intention Positive effect ( $\beta=0.161$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), hypothesis H1b was verified; M3 included both interpersonal loneliness and existential loneliness into the regression equation test, showing interpersonal loneliness ( $\beta=0.354$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and existential loneliness ( $\beta=0.172$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) both had significant positive effects on turnover intention, H1a and H1b were verified again, and H1 was verified at the same time. M4, M5, and M6 examined the effects of emotional toughness, cognitive toughness and behavioral toughness on turnover intention respectively, showing that emotional toughness ( $\beta=-0.329$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), cognitive toughness ( $\beta=-0.259$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and behavioral toughness ( $\beta=-0.177$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) had significant negative effects on turnover intention, respectively, and H2a, H2b, and H2c were verified respectively; when M7 included emotional toughness, cognitive toughness and behavioral toughness into the regression equation test at the same time, It showed that emotional toughness ( $\beta=-0.311$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), cognitive toughness ( $\beta=-0.272$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and behavioral toughness ( $\beta=-0.183$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) all had significant negative effects on turnover intention. H2a, H2b, H2c are verified again, and H2 is verified at the same time.

**Table 1** Direct effect analysis

Variables	Dependent variable: turnover intention						
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7
<b>Research variables</b>							
Interpersonal loneliness	0.386***		0.354***				
Existential loneliness		0.161***	0.172***				
Emotional toughness				-0.329***			-0.311***
Cognitive toughness					-0.259***		-0.272***
Behavioral toughness						-0.177**	-0.183**
<b>Statistical changes</b>							
R2	0.369	0.401	0.401	0.316	0.375	0.359	0.268
R of amendments <sup>2</sup>	0.358	0.394	0.394	0.308	0.364	0.351	0.254

Note: \*\* p <0.01, \*\*\* p <0.001.

**4.4.2. Moderation Test**

As shown in Table 2, M9 adds emotional toughness to M8, showing that emotional toughness ( $\beta=-0.332$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) has a significant negative impact on turnover intention. On the basis of M9, M10 added the interaction items of emotional toughness and interpersonal loneliness and existential loneliness, respectively. The results showed that interpersonal loneliness ( $\beta=-0.152$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), existential loneliness ( $\beta=-0.148$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and the interaction item of emotional toughness had a significant negative impact on turnover intention, H3a was verified; M11 added cognitive toughness on the basis of M8, and the results showed that cognitive toughness ( $\beta=-0.281$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) also had a significant negative impact on turnover intention. M12 added the interaction

items of cognitive toughness and interpersonal loneliness and existential loneliness on the basis of M11. The results showed that interpersonal loneliness ( $\beta=-0.150$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), existential loneliness ( $\beta=-0.143$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and the interaction item of cognitive toughness all had a significant negative impact on turnover intention, verifying H3b; M13 added behavioral toughness on the basis of M8. On this basis, M14 added the interaction items of behavioral toughness and interpersonal loneliness and existential loneliness, the results show that the coefficients of the interaction term of interpersonal loneliness ( $\beta=-0.087$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), existential loneliness ( $\beta=-0.056$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and behavioral resilience are not significantly positive, so H3c did not hold. Based on the above tests, H3a, H3b are established, but H3c is not established, so the H3 part is established.

**Table 2** Regression analysis results of moderating effects

Variables	Dependent variable: turnover intention						
	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12	M13	M14
<b>Research variables</b>							
Interpersonal loneliness	0.354***	0.344***	0.321***	0.350***	0.308***	0.352***	0.350***
Existential loneliness	0.172***	0.166**	0.162**	0.169***	0.163**	0.170***	0.168***
Emotional toughness		-	-				
		0.332***	0.308***				
Interpersonal loneliness×Emotional toughness			-0.152**				
Existential loneliness×Emotional toughness			-0.148***				
Cognitive toughness				-	-		
				0.281***	0.278***		
Interpersonal loneliness×Cognitive toughness					-0.150*		

Existential loneliness×Cognitive toughness									-0.143*
Behavioral toughness									-
									0.186***
Interpersonal loneliness×Behavioral toughness									-0.087
Existential loneliness×Behavioral toughness									-0.056
<b>Statistical changes</b>									
R2	0.401	0.498	0.512	0.494	0.503	0.469	0.472		
R of amendments2	0.394	0.488	0.497	0.486	0.492	0.458	0.459		

Note: \* p <0.05, \*\* p <0.01, \*\*\* p <0.001.

### 5. CONCLUSIONS

This study draws the following conclusions: (1) Workplace loneliness has a significant positive impact on turnover intention, which indicates that employees with poor interpersonal relationships and low presence in the workplace have less emotional belonging needs and are prone to quitting. This requires business leaders to communicate more with employees and organize activities to create a harmonious and positive group atmosphere. (2) Occupational toughness has a significant negative impact on turnover intention, which shows that employees with strong self-adaptation and resilience to difficulties encountered in the workplace are usually less likely to have the idea of leaving. (3) Emotional toughness and cognitive toughness have a negative moderating effect on the relationship between workplace loneliness and turnover intention, indicating that the higher the professional enthusiasm, adaptability and self-efficacy of employees in adversity, the higher their awareness of professional loneliness and disappointment. The more emotionally motivated the less you think of leaving. This requires enterprises to strengthen employee training, promote team culture, and increase material rewards and spiritual encouragement such as bonuses and benefits.

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