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## Are Organisational Politics Responsible for Turnover Intention in French Firefighters?

Marina Burakova<sup>1\*</sup>, Almuth McDowall<sup>2</sup>, Carine Bianvet<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*Purpose* – The purpose of this paper is to examine the effect of different facets of perceived organisational politics and workplace attitudes onto turnover intention in the French Fire and Rescue service.

*Methodology* – An electronic survey was administered to fire department employees (N=255) to investigate the effects of different forms of perceived organisational politics (POP) onto turnover intention, and test for mediation by affective organisational commitment and job satisfaction with structural equation modelling (Lisrel 9.90).

*Findings* – Both pay-and-promotion and general perceived organisational politics indirectly predicted turnover intention in French firefighters, although the total effect of pay-and-promotion politics was greater than general politics. Affective organisational commitment and job satisfaction mediated the effect of perceived organisational politics onto turnover intention.

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*Practical implications* – Public organisations, which have recently undergone reorganisations, should monitor perceptions of organisational politics to better understand the association with attitudes (such as affective organisational commitment and job satisfaction), as well as to predict turnover intention.

*Originality/value* – The study goes expands on the identification of various turnover intention's antecedents to contribute to consider understanding of its reasons, such as perceived organisational politics, where pay-and-promotion politics appears to be more salient factor than general politics. Affective organisational commitment and job satisfaction mediate the effects of POP onto turnover intention with nuanced effects. We also generated support for the order of factors in the model, where job satisfaction is a first-order predictor of turnover intention and organisational commitment second-order one. The POP Scale (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991) was validated in French.

*Key words:* Perceived organisational politics, Organisational commitment, Job satisfaction, Turnover intention, Firefighters.

## Résumé

*Objectif* – L’objectif de l’article consiste à comprendre l’effet des politiques organisationnelles perçues, ainsi que des attitudes au travail sur l’intention de départ dans un Service Départemental d’Incendie et de Secours.

*Méthode* – Un questionnaire électronique est administré auprès des sapeurs-pompiers (N=255) afin de tester les effets de différentes facettes des politiques organisationnelles perçues sur l’intention de départ, médiatisés par l’engagement organisationnel affectif et la satisfaction au travail. Un modèle empirique est obtenu suite à la modélisation en équations structurales (Lisrel 9.90).

*Résultats* – Selon le modèle validé, deux types de politiques organisationnelles – politiques générales et politiques en lien avec la rémunération et la promotion – prédisent indirectement l’intention de départ chez les sapeurs-pompiers. L’effet total des politiques en lien avec la rémunération et la promotion surpasse l’effet total des politiques générales. Les deux attitudes – l’engagement organisationnel affectif et la satisfaction au travail - médiatisent l’effet des politiques organisationnelles perçues sur l’intention de départ.

*Préconisations appliquées* – Nous préconisons aux organisations du secteur public dont le profil s’apparente aux Services Départementaux d’Incendie et de Secours de mettre en place une veille de la perception des politiques organisationnelles qui peuvent expliquer le changement au niveau des attitudes au travail, ainsi qu’en termes d’intention de départ.

*Originalité/nouveauté* – La présente étude propose d’élargir la lecture des antécédents de l’intention de départ et d’y intégrer les véritables raisons de départ, telles les politiques organisationnelles. Les rôles des médiateurs des effets des politiques perçues, engagement affectif et satisfaction au travail, sont nuancés. En accord avec le modèle confirmé, la satisfaction au travail s’avère l’antécédent direct de l’intention de départ, tandis que l’engagement organisationnel affectif apparaît comme facteur de deuxième ordre. L’échelle POPS (Perceived Organisational Politics’ Scale, Kacmar & Ferris, 1991) est partiellement validée en langue française. Deux sur trois dimensions de l’échelle permettent d’obtenir un modèle de mesure satisfaisant.

*Mots clés* : Politiques organisationnelles perçues, Engagement organisationnel affectif, Satisfaction au travail, Intention de départ, Sapeurs-pompier.

## **Are Organisational Politics Responsible for Turnover Intention in French Firefighters?**

### **Introduction**

Organisational withdrawal – why workers leave their organisations - has been of continued scholarly interest for the best part of 100 years. From an initial focus on practical solutions research has progressively developed into a theoretical field of study based on several conceptual models. Following several decades focused on attitudinal explanations of withdrawal (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Curriivan, 1999; Farrell, 1983; Gaertner, 1999; Griffeth et al., 2000; Tett & Meyer, 1993), a more complex understanding of the mechanisms, antecedents, and reasons for withdrawal is being established (Holtom et al., 2018; Hom et al., 2017; Maertz & Griffeth, 2004; Rubenstein et al., 2018). Regarding any antecedents, potentially complex organisational contexts remain least well understood compared to the influence of job and individual characteristics (e.g., Rubenstein et al., 2018) in combination with individual characteristics. Examples are where high motivation to make a difference is observed along with perceptions of low or inadequate compensation, where workers endeavour to do a good job with diminishing resources, or where employees endeavour to understand salient implicit organizational set by powerful groups (Bedi & Schat, 2013; Bukari & Kamal, 2015; Ferris et al., 2019).

A salient relevant construct to explain such phenomena is perceived organisational politics (POP) defined as actions directed towards power figures in order to protect one's self-interests (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). POP is considered inherent in the social life of any organisation covering a wide range of issues relating to individual, environmental job-related and

organisational factors (Ferris et al., 2019; Hochwater et al., 2020) which in turn offer a plausible explanation of why workers chose to stay or leave (Bedi & Schat, 2013; Chang et al., 2009).

Therefore, the objective of the current paper was to investigate how French firefighters' perceptions of such politics influence their intentions to remain in their Fire department. Although there was pragmatic impetus for the research, which was a collaboration with a French fire department that sought to understand organisation-based reasons for withdrawal, our objectives were also theoretical to test recent models of withdrawal behaviour and POP by putting focus on specific geographical and organisational contexts (e.g., Rubenstein et al., 2018).

Workplace attitudes have been considered as antecedents of turnover intention and turnover for some time (e.g., Garland et al., 2013; Meyer, Stanley et al., 2002; Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2011). Yet, their explanatory value for understanding the '*whys*' of withdrawal has been questioned in more recent integrative models (Hom et al., 2012; Woo & Maertz, 2012) which distinguish between (a) predictors, (b) reasons, c) shocks and (d) motives (Woo & Maertz, 2012) to propose profiles of quitting behaviours (Maertz & Campion, 2004) and proximal withdrawal states (Hom et al., 2012). Such models suggest that job attitudes precede, but do not *explain* withdrawal because they indicate whether individuals *want* to stay, but not whether they *can* stay (Hom et al., 2012, p.845). In contrast, the reasons, or 'loci of causality', manifest in various forms including preferences (*why one wants to stay*) or constraints (*why one cannot quit*) (Hom et al., 2012). Among the most salient preference forces are affective ones, in particular job embeddedness including person-job/person-organisation fit, links and sacrifices (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2001).

Although the understanding of the general organisational context provides potentially helpful framing for relevant interventions, this aspect remains under investigated due to difficulties in operationalisation (Ferris et al., 2019; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991). To address this, we investigated the effect of two facets of POP, which were (1) general and (2) pay-and-promotion politics and two job attitudes, namely job satisfaction and organisational commitment, onto turnover intention. The following sections introduce the theoretical framing to detail the notion of withdrawal antecedent and reasons, discuss the role of job attitudes as proximal predictors and that of POP as a probable withdrawal reason. We expected that POP, as a reason for withdrawal, has an indirect effect onto turnover intention mediated by attitudinal antecedents (Hom et al., 2012).

### **Antecedents and Reasons of Turnover Intention**

Voluntary turnover is commonly defined as “the termination of formal relations between an employee and an organisation” (Krausz, 2002, p.54). Given that turnover intention strongly predicts actual turnover (e.g., Iverson, 1999; Langkamer & Ervin, 2008; Sjöberg & Sverke, 2000), and the methodological difficulties inherent in studying turnover as such, much research has thus focused on intentions to turnover which is considered representative of actual turnover (Hom et al., 2012; Holtom et al., 2008; Mor Barak et al., 2001; Rubenstein et al., 2018).

Since the seminal works on quitting profiles (Maertz & Campion, 2004), quitting reasons (Woo & Maertz, 2012), and proximal withdrawal states (Hom et al., 2012), the turnover theory has made a distinction between respective antecedents (what precedes the criterion on any time continuum) and reasons (what explains the criterion). Early research conceptualised turnover as a behavioural response to global dissatisfaction with the work and organisational context



(e.g., Farrell, 1983; Mobley, 1977). Subsequent studies have more specifically identified low levels job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Currivan, 1999; Griffeth et al., 2000; Hopkins et al., 2010) as predictors of turnover intention (Griffeth et al., 2000). According to the latest advances in the turnover theory, workplace attitudes are conceptualised as turnover antecedents rather than reasons (Holtom et al., 2017; Hom et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2018; Li et al., 2016; Rubenstein et al., 2018) based on the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977).

Job satisfaction is defined as a general positive emotional state that results from the overall evaluation of one's job and job-related experience (Fouquereau & Rioux, 2002; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012; Ng & Feldman, 2010) operationalised either as a multifaceted attitude directed towards various workplace targets (task, relationships with peers and supervisors, pay, promotion, etc.) or a global evaluation. Organisational commitment reflects workers' ties to their organisation and their readiness to invest efforts and resources (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Among the three forms of organisational commitment, affective commitment as a form of emotional attachment to and identification with the organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1990) has the strongest correlation with turnover intention (e.g., Carmeli & Freund, 2009; Huang et al., 2007; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990) and job satisfaction (Dello Russo et al., 2013) compared to normative and continuance commitment. Overall job satisfaction and organisational commitment appear the most salient workplace context evaluations as compared to more specific target-oriented attitudes, including perception of organisational support, organisational justice or relationships with one's supervisor (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Job satisfaction, conceptualised as a general factor, has a larger scope (because it concerns job, organisation, and work relationships in equal measures) than organisational commitment (targeted towards one's organisation) (Ng & Feldman, 2010).

Building on the discussion about specific to global attitudes (e.g., Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012), recent meta-analyses and systematic reviews (Hom et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2018; Rubenstein et al., 2018) contend that job satisfaction is a direct turnover antecedent (which does not mean it is a turnover reason). Indeed, more recent models question the role of attitudes in the development of turnover intention and turnover (see Hom et al., 2017) as proximal to withdrawal, but not responsible for it (Maertz & Campion, 2004; Holtom et al., 2017; Hom et al., 2012). The notion of shock<sup>†</sup> introduced by Lee and Mitchell (1996) and developed by Holtom and colleagues (2017), as well as the concepts of turnover reason<sup>‡</sup> (Woo & Maertz, 2012) or withdrawal force<sup>§</sup> (Hom et al., 2012) aim to distinguish specific versus general workplace evaluations (workplace attitudes) and specific turnover/withdrawal constructs. Rubenstein and co-authors (2018) revisit the findings of the meta-analysis by de Griffeth and colleagues (2000) categorising turnover antecedents into nine clusters<sup>\*\*</sup> to establish (low) job satisfaction as the most salient direct antecedent of turnover. Given such recent advances, a generic turnover model (Fig. 1) depicts a causal chain that comprises: a turnover reason → a job attitude → a turnover intention and → a turnover.

Regarding any relationship between satisfaction and commitment *per se* those conducted with English-speaking samples (e.g., Agarwal & Sajid, 2017; Currivan, 1999; Griffeth et al., 2000) indicate that organisational commitment is the closest antecedent of turnover [intention], while samples from other cultures do not support this (e.g., Burakova et al., 2014; Hsu & Liao, 2016;

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<sup>†</sup> *Shocks* are particular, jarring events that initiate the psychological decision processes involved in quitting a job (Lee & Mitchell, 1996, p.6).

<sup>‡</sup> *Reason* is “a naturalistic expression of perceived cause of behavior” (Woo & Maertz, 2012, p.573). It should be studied because direct causes of turnover cannot be captured by traditional predictors (*idem*).

<sup>§</sup> The idea of withdrawal motivational forces stems from the works initiated by Maertz. Thus, turnover forces are depicted as “motive categories that drive decisions about whether to stay or leave an organization” (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004, p.669).

<sup>\*\*</sup> The nine clusters include: 1) individual attributes; 2) aspects of job; 3) traditional job attitudes; 4) newer personal conditions; 5) organisational context; 6) person-context interface; 7) external job market; 8) attitudinal withdrawal; 9) employee behaviours (Rubenstein et al., 2018).

Semmer et al., 2014). There is no consensus either conceptual or empirical (Saridakis et al., 2018; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Four types of relationship between the two variables have been identified in the only systematic review on the topic (Saridakis et al., 2018): 1) job satisfaction explains organisational commitment; 2) organisational commitment predicts job satisfaction; 3) both attitudes are affected by one another; 4) there is no relationship between organisational commitment and job satisfaction. The theoretical underpinning of the first type of causal relationship “job satisfaction → organisational commitment” refers to social exchange theory according to which organisational members evaluate first the extent to which their efforts are rewarded by the organisation, which determines the scope of their commitment. Placing organisational commitment before job satisfaction in the causal chain stems from cognitive dissonance theory. Thus, when people decide to work for a given organisation, they first commit to it (specific scope and subsequently interpret the overall work experience – global job satisfaction or broad scope (Ng & Feldman, 2010). There is also evidence regarding a reciprocal relationship between job satisfaction and organisational commitment where neither prevails (Huan & Hsiao, 2007), who conclude that none of the two variables prevails and the relationship is reciprocated. The last model stipulates no relationships between job satisfaction and organisational commitment, which has been empirically supported across several studies although any conceptual rationale remains unclear with some indication of the importance of other variables, such as personality and organisational (Saridakis et al., 2018).

--- Insert Fig. 1 here ---

Although job satisfaction and affective organisational commitment have been identified as the salient antecedents of turnover [intention] (Hom et al., 2012; Li et al., 2016; Maertz & Campion, 2004; Woo & Maertz, 2012), there is no consensus regarding the respective order in

conceptual turnover models given probable reverse and/or mutual effects (Huan & Hsiao, 2007; Saridakis et al., 2018). Prior research indicates job satisfaction and affective organisational commitment as mere indicators of a desire to (not) withdraw from their organisation rather than predictors (Garland et al., 2013; Holtom et al., 2016; Hom et al., 2012; Hom et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2018; Rubenstein et al., 2018; Woo & Maertz, 2012). Thus, it was our aim to clarify the proximity of these attitudes to turnover intention and further understanding of preceding withdrawal reasons.

### **Organisational Politics as Reasons for Turnover Intention**

Withdrawal reasons have been classified as preference or constraint forces (Hom et al., 2012; Maertz & Campion, 2004). Regarding preference reasons (*I want and can quit*), Hom and co-authors (2012) identify these as affective, calculative, constituent, moral, and alternative forces inherent in the workplace context including job, organisation and work relations. If job characteristics and workplace relationships are established withdrawal reasons, the role of organisational characteristics as a constraint antecedent needs more investigation (Mor Barak et al., 2001) and in particular organisational context (Rubenstein et al., 2018) including aspects such as organisational climate, support, rewards offered, organisational size and prestige and recommend furthering our knowledge of other organisational characteristics. It is our intention to clarify the role of POP as a potential constraint.

Organisational politics reflect an evaluation of the workplace context characterised by unsanctioned, self-serving behaviour linked to informal actions directed towards power figures to protect one's self-interests over others, for example striving for in-group status, sucking up to others, backstabbing, and pursuing personal goals instead of those that benefit the group or

organisation (Hochwarter et al., 2020; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). A politicised organisation is characterised by 1) exercise of influence; 2) promotion of one's self-interests; 3) presence of two parties with potentially diverging interests (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). Regarding the types of others' behaviours that may qualify as politicked, perceived organisational politics (POP) includes general political behaviour, go along to get ahead and pay-and-promotion politics (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). Perceived general political behaviour refers to qualifying organisational members' actions as serving self-interests and aiming at obtaining valued outcomes, contrary to which go-along-to-get-ahead behaviour means remaining passive in order to keep valued outcomes. Finally, pay-and-promotion politics depicts an organisation, which acts politically via the enacted advancement rules (*idem*). In the light of the proximal withdrawal states model (Hom et al., 2012), both general and go-along-to-get-ahead perceived politics may be identified with negative constituent forces, while pay-and-promotion politics – with embedding Human Resource Management (HRM) practices. Negative constituent forces are argued as responsible for the desire to leave, while HRM practices, if aimed at reinforcing the link between organisation and its members, would contribute to the willingness to stay in one's organisation (for a more detailed discussion of the Proximal withdrawal states model, see Hom et al., 2012).

The perception of one's organisational context as highly politicised leads to various negative outcomes (Ferris et al., 2019; Harris et al., 2007; Harris & Kacmar, 2005) which have been conceptualised in various way including as a stressor (Chang et al., 2009), an event (Hochwarter et al., 2020), or a kind of job demand (Bedi & Schat, 2013). Although outcomes relevant to occupational health, such as burnout, are well documented (Bedi & Schat, 2013; Chang et al., 2009; Harris et al., 2009; Swartz & Potgieter, 2017; Miller et al., 2008; Karatepe et al., 2012), attitudinal and behavioural outcomes require further investigation (Chang et al.,

2009; Haider et al., 2020). Previous research indicates that POP deteriorates job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Abbas et al., 2012; Bukhari & Kamal, 2015; Luqman et al., 2015) and positive forms of organisational behaviour (Abbas et al., 2012; Agarwal, 2016; Bedi & Schat, 2013; Bukhari & Kamal, 2015; Butt, 2016; Cheong & Kim, 2017; Eldor, 2017). There is also evidence that POP's effects onto turnover [intention] are mediated by workplace attitudes (Bukhari & Kamal, 2015; Butt, 2016; Haider et al., 2020), among which the most salient are organisational commitment (Agarwal et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2008; Vigoda, 2010) and job satisfaction (Agarwal, 2016; Labrague et al., 2016; Chinomona & Mofokeng, 2016). Several explanations exist for the mechanisms whereby POP affect attitudinal, behavioural and health outcomes. One of the most robust refers to the notion of resources in accordance with the COR-theory (Bukhari & Kamal, 2015; Chang et al., 2009; Haider et al., 2020; Hobfoll, 2011). From this perspective, POP is a process during which the experience of uncertainty depletes employees' resources. The attempts to identify relevant strategies and possible outcomes within a politicised organisation lead employees to the progressive depletion of resources. The organisation appears responsible for the overwhelming and unrealistic demands on the one hand and misfit with the employees' needs on the other one (Chang et al., 2009). When they identify the link between organisational membership on the one hand and time and energy loss, as well as misfit to their psychological needs on the other one, they decrease in organisational commitment (Haider et al., 2020; Stan & Vîrgă, 2021). In the same vein, the overall evaluation of an organisation as politicked is associated with a deteriorated job satisfaction (Agarwal, 2016). The decrease in affective commitment and job satisfaction are known to precede the intention to withdraw from the organisation (Chang et al., 2009; Haider et al., 2020).

Although there is some consensus about the detrimental character of the outcomes of POP in general, little if nothing is reported about the nuances three forms of POP (general, go-along-to-get-ahead, and pay-and-promotion) may produce in terms of those outcomes. As pointed out by Ferris and his co-authors in their recent review (2019), future research can provide a more detailed understanding of POP by testing the dimensional aspects of the construct. In accordance with the current literature and with regard to the lack of evidence necessary to specify the effects of the POP's facets, as well as the factor order relevant to job satisfaction and affective organisational commitment, we advance a general mediational hypothesis:

*HM: The effects of perceived organisational politics (POP) onto turnover intention are mediated by job satisfaction and affective organisational commitment.*

We thus had no a priori predictions about the factor order and the relative influence of the POP facets but investigated these as exploratory analyses.

## **Method**

### **Organisational Context of the French Fire Department**

The study was initiated by a South-Eastern French fire department to further enhanced understanding of firefighters' turnover. Given that the local specificity of the context was crucial for our decision to address the construct of POP as theoretical framing, we briefly summarise the socio-historical context of the study.

French firefighters respond on average every seven seconds to emergency calls (Ministère de l'Intérieur, 2014) relying on human resource 24 hours a day, seven days a week. McLennan and co-authors (2011) have warned that predicting and controlling turnover in the emergency sector is crucial due to potentially detrimental effects on the quality and speed of operational response, yet there is insufficient evidence about the likely reasons for withdrawal in firefighters. Despite documented high job demands including night work and irregular hours, the organisational context remains a key reason for withdrawal behaviours indicating that perceived conditions and environment rather than the job prompt individuals to leave (Riedel, 2011).

Historically established as community-based institutions with a high percentage of volunteers<sup>††</sup>, the French Fire and Rescue Service has evolved over time into more formalised organisations. As part of the reform in 1996 (Loi n° 96-369, 1996), fire departments lost their decision-making autonomy and became double-governed county-level public authorities (under control of both State and County). Decision-making power became more centralised and distant and ambiguously distributed between professional, volunteer fire-fights and administrative staff (Riedel, 2011). As a result, to this day county fire departments face difficulties in making independent decisions about resource and power distribution, which is typical of public-sector organisations (Cheong & Kim, 2017; Vigoda, 2000; Vigoda-Gadot & Talmud, 2010). Lack of clarity in the reconfiguration and definition of renegotiated organisational principles has also been linked to increased turnover rates in firefighters, highlighting the need to attend to contextual factors (Riedel, 2011).

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<sup>††</sup> Volunteers represent 80% of all the French firefighters, they hold the same grades as professional firefighters (DGSCGC, 2016). They are rewarded between 7,60 € and 11,43 € per hour depending upon their rank (Décret n° 2015-601, 2015).



## Procedure and Participants

We took the following steps in undertaken the present study:

1. We designed a bespoke survey including the scales that operationalised the study's constructs (see the Measures section for more details). The POP scale (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991) was translated into French following the method of cross-cultural construct equivalence by three bilingual experts with the further expert panel (Arce-Ferrer, 2006; Arce-Ferrer & Ketterer, 2003).
2. We distributed the survey invitation electronically via an existing email list and held this open for three weeks (Petrovčič, Petrič, & Manfreda, 2016).
3. We processed the data with Jamovi 1.1.9 to perform preliminary analyses (descriptive statistics, mean comparison, CFA and correlations)
4. We compared and tested three concurrent models (for the rationale, see §2.1) (Lisrel 8.80):
  - a. Model 1: job satisfaction and organisational commitment as direct antecedents to turnover intention;
  - b. Model 2: organisational commitment as a direct antecedent and job satisfaction as an indirect antecedent to turnover intention;
  - c. Model 3: job satisfaction as a direct antecedent; organisational commitment as an indirect antecedent to turnover intention.

In total, 255 staff members (both permanent and volunteer) took part in the study representing an 11.1% response rate which was satisfactory for a web-survey (Petrovčič et al., 2016; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2012). Our final sample consisted of 76.5% male participants, the mean age was 42 (SD = 9.5); 48% of the sample were professional firefighters, 31% were volunteers, and 21 % were administrative and technical personnel. This corresponds broadly

to the overall demographic profile of this fire department. Average service length was under 15 years (SD = 9.8) which broadly aligns with the target population (83% male, average age is 37 years, average service tenure 11.5 years; DGSCGC, 2016).

## Measures

We examined all scale items for their fit with the respective measures as outlined below which unless otherwise indicated were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5. The reliability is reported in accordance with the current understanding of this psychometric characteristic (see Streiner, 2003) either via  $\alpha$ -Chronbach for unidimensional scales or  $\omega$ -McDonald for multidimensional scales (Table 1).

1. POP was measured with the 12-item *Perceptions of Organisational Politics Scale* (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991), translated to French and validated for the present study. Example item: “*Favoritism rather than merit determines who gets ahead around me*”. The best factorial solution included two factors: general politics and pay-and-promotion politics. Due to low factor loadings several items were dropped from further analysis including the entire factor ‘Going along to get ahead’. The validation process can be found in the Supplementary Material.
2. Affective organisational commitment was measured with the French version (Vandenberghe, 1996) of the *Organisational Commitment Scale* (Allen & Meyer, 1990), 6 items. Example item: “*I feel personally attached to my organisation*”.
3. Job satisfaction was measured with the *Satisfaction with Life Scale at Work (SWLS-W)* (Diener et al., 1985) validated in French and adapted to work context by Fouquereau and Rioux (2002); 5 items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Example item: “*The conditions of my work life are excellent*”.

4. Turnover intention was measured by the *Scale of Intention to Leave* (Bertrand et al., 2010); 5 items were rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 4. Example item: “*I have an intent to leave my organisation*”.

The control variables included age, sex, service length, and occupation type (volunteer firefighters, professional firefighters, and technical and administrative staff).

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis for all the study scales. As a result, we obtained satisfactory measurement models and reliability indexes for all the study scales: 1) affective organisational commitment scale (Vandenberghe, 1996) ( $\chi^2/df = 14/7$ ; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .01;  $\alpha = .92$ ); 2) job satisfaction scale (Fouquereau & Rioux, 2002) ( $\chi^2/df = 11/5$ ; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .02;  $\alpha = .90$ ); 3) turnover intention scale (Bertrand et al., 2010) ( $\chi^2/df = 10/5$ ; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .02;  $\alpha = .88$ ).

The POP scale was first translated into French with further validation (for more details, see Supplementary Material). We performed further group comparisons (T-test for sex & ANOVA for occupation type) and correlation analyses controlling organisational demographical characteristics. The only significant between-group difference (one-way ANOVA) concerned the type of occupation (professional firefighters, volunteer firefighters, and administrative staff) with regard to the following variables: 1) turnover intention,  $\eta^2 = .04$ ,  $p < .01$ ; 2) general POP,  $\eta^2 = .03$ ,  $p < .05$ ; 3) pay-and-promotion POP,  $\eta^2 = .03$ ,  $p < .05$ . Although the results were

significant, the effect sizes were small regarding a potential contribution to the causal model of turnover intention.

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the study variables. Both POP facets (general politics and pay-and-promotion politics) had moderate to high negative correlations with affective commitment and job satisfaction, and positive correlations with turnover intention in line with previous studies (Chang et al., 2009; Harris et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2008). The estimation of the study variables correlations provided preliminary support for the hypothesis of an indirect effect of POP onto turnover intention.

--- Insert Table 1 here ---

### **Test of the Causal Model in Latent Variables**

As current empirical literature does not provide consensus to support a predicted type of effect (direct versus indirect effects for POP) or predicted type of mediation (either job satisfaction, or affective organisational commitment, or both) we tested three concurrent models: 1) the effects of general and pay-and-promotion politics onto turnover intention as mediated by both job satisfaction and affective organisational commitment, which are considered direct antecedents to turnover intention; 2) the effects of general and pay-and-promotion politics onto turnover intention are first mediated by job satisfaction and then by affective organisational commitment; 3) the effects of general and pay-and-promotion politics onto turnover intention are first mediated by affective organisational commitment, then by job satisfaction (Table 4)<sup>††</sup>. The Model 3 has is characterised by the most optimal overall fit including  $\chi^2/df$  ratio, RMSEA

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<sup>††</sup> Service length and occupation type were included into the models, but their effects turned to be insignificant.

and SRMR (Ullman & Bentler, 2013; Moshagen & Auerswald, 2018). The least favourable overall fit indices characterise the Model 1. As regards explanatory power, the  $R^2$  for Model 2 “satisfaction  $\rightarrow$  commitment  $\rightarrow$  turnover intention” is considerably lower ( $R^2_{adj.} = .37$ ) than the one of the Model 3 “commitment  $\rightarrow$  satisfaction  $\rightarrow$  turnover intention” ( $R^2_{adj.} = .45$ ) and the Model 1 “commitment  $\rightarrow$  turnover intention + satisfaction  $\rightarrow$  turnover intention” ( $R^2_{adj.} = .44$ ) (see Fairchild et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2021). Finally, the comparison of total effects (Table 4) for these variables onto turnover intention identifies job satisfaction as the more salient antecedent of turnover intention (-.68 for job satisfaction and -.41 for affective organisational commitment).

--- Insert Table 2 here ---

Thus, the effect of general politics onto job satisfaction is fully mediated by affective organisational commitment, while the effect of pay-and-promotion POP is partially mediated (Figure 2). Our mediation hypothesis is therefore supported and the respective importance of the mediators, as well as the effects of POP’s facets onto turnover intention, specified.

--- Insert Table 3 here ---

--- Insert Fig. 2 here ---

The standardised total effects of POP (Macho & Ledermann, 2011) are presented in Table 6. The overall model had satisfactory explanatory power (adjusted  $R^2 = .45$  for turnover intention) and moderate to high total effect sizes (.35 to -.68) of predictors on the dependent variable except for perception of general politics (.11).

--- Insert Table 4 here ---

Job satisfaction had the largest total effect on turnover intention. Affective commitment had a lower total effect on turnover intention. Regarding POP, the total effect size pay-and-promotion politics onto turnover was comparable with that of affective commitment, while general politics had rather a weak effect on the dependent variable.

### **Discussion**

The results offer support for our overall mediation hypothesis.

The effect of POP, conceptualised as a withdrawal reason, onto turnover intention is mediated by job attitudes which accords with the growing literature on POP and organisational behaviour (Agarwal, 2016; Labrague et al., 2016; Chinomona & Mofokeng, 2016) and the generic withdrawal model (Fig.1). Job satisfaction is a direct antecedent to turnover intention as a robust indicator of potential withdrawal. Affective organisational commitment, as a more specific evaluation targeted towards one's organisation, precedes turnover intention indirectly in accordance with previous studies (e.g., Burakova et al., 2014; Hsu & Liao, 2016).

Our findings point to a more refined understanding of the role POP plays in withdrawal. The two POP's facets predict turnover intention indirectly, but in two different ways. The effect of the general POP onto turnover intention is fully and sequentially mediated by organisational commitment (1) and job satisfaction (2), while the effect of the pay-and-promotion POP is partially mediated by organisational commitment (1) and then fully mediated by job satisfaction (2) (Fig. 2). That the effect sizes of the examined POP facets are different from that

communicated in two meta-analyses (Chang et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2008) can be linked to the facet-based examination of POP in our study. Specifically, the effect size of general POP is lower than is in previous research, while the effect size of pay-and-promotion POP in our sample of French firefighters is comparatively greater and comparable with the effect of affective commitment. We hope that, in this sense, our study offers, for the first time, a differentiated view on general and pay-and-promotion perceived politics.

We consider the overall contribution of the present research as three-fold. At the conceptual level, we offer a more nuanced knowledge of the effects of the two POP facets onto turnover intention; where pay-and-promotion politics appear particularly salient in a context marked by relatively constrained decision latitude, more so than general POP. As an aside, we offer a methodological contribution through the validation of a French version of the POP scale (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). At the practical level, we put forward several recommendations targeting the transparency and equitability of the criteria of organisational decision. First however, we turn to the theoretical implications.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Our impetus was to investigate a causal model of turnover intention in French firefighters including both withdrawal antecedents (job satisfaction and affective organisational commitment) and reasons (POP's facets) in accordance with the proximal withdrawal states model (Hom et al., 2012). Our specific exploratory objectives were: 1) to specify the factor order with regard to job satisfaction and affective organisational commitment; and 2) to clarify how exactly POP facets predict turnover intention in French firefighters.

Regarding our first objective, our findings are consistent with content (e.g., Griffith et al., 2000) and processual approaches (Lee & Mitchell, 1994) to turnover, as well as with the hybrid model of proximal withdrawal states (Hom et al., 2012). Indeed, job satisfaction remains closely tied with turnover intention and precedes it directly. The fact that POP's effect onto turnover intention is mediated by affective commitment and job satisfaction is consistent with the recent discussions of turnover models (Holtom et al., 2017; Holtom et al., 2018; Hom et al., 2012; Hom et al., 2017; Rubenstein et al., 2018) and previous research on French firefighters (Burakova et al., 2014). Regarding the effect of affective organisational commitment onto turnover intention, there is less consensus in the literature. Both, direct and indirect effects are reported (see meta-analysis by Miller et al., 2008). Saridakis et al. (2018) report mutual effects both attitudes further to the comparison of four concurrent models. In our study, affective organisational commitment has an indirect negative effect onto turnover intention. This finding is consistent with the literature on the scope of workplace attitudes. Organisational commitment has a narrower scope (targeted towards one's organisation) as compared to job satisfaction (targeted towards the whole workplace context including organisation, task and workplace relationships) (Ng & Feldman, 2010). Moreover, the total effect size of affective organisational commitment is considerably smaller than that of job satisfaction onto turnover intention. We elaborate our rationale on the idea of the scope width relevant to workplace attitudes (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012; Ng & Feldman, 2010). From this perspective, both findings (total effect size and factor order) seem logical. Another explanation is found in the research linking POP, work demands and resources (e.g., Chang et al., 2009; Haider et al., 2020). Thus, POP is associated with the progressive depletion of resources in employees trapped by the overwhelming demands the organisation puts on them. The organisation cannot be considered as target to which employees are emotionally tied to as it does not exercise its duty of care. Thus, with time, POP leads to the decrease in affective organisational commitment (Chang et



al., 2009; Haider et al., 2020; Stan & Vîrgă, 2021). Such misfit is then reflected in an overall evaluation employees make of their workplace experiences. Low levels of job satisfaction merely indicate the probability of withdrawal (Hom et al., 2012).

Regarding our second objective, to clarify how exactly POP facets predict turnover intention in French firefighters, we provide the following interpretation. Our study indicates that POP adversely influences job satisfaction and positively predicts turnover intention, which is consistent with the existing literature (Bedi & Schat, 2013; Ferris et al., 2019; Kacmar et al., 1999; Miller et al., 2008; Yousaf et al., 2014). Beyond this, our study provides additional evidence of the detrimental consequences of POP at the level of organisational behaviour, given that negative forms of organisational behaviour are less studied as compared to the positive ones (like job performance) (Miller et al., 2008). For the first time, we provide a novel nuanced analysis of the role that POP's facets play in a withdrawal model. We have, thus, brought a contribution to the theorisation of POP as a complex multi-dimensional construct in accordance with the latest recommendations (Ferris et al., 2019). As we know, POP reflects employees' beliefs about their organisation. Depending upon the nature of such beliefs, incumbents tend to identify or not with their organisation (affective commitment) and to consider the overall workplace context as comfortable and relevant to their expectations or not (job satisfaction). Whereas general POP only influences affective commitment, pay-and-promotion POP directly affects both commitment and satisfaction and better explain turnover intention. As to general POP, it corresponds to the perception of behaviours targeted towards resource ownership in the context with no clear rules and regulations (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). Others' behaviour is regarded as serving their own interests without consideration of their peers' values and needs. When organisation is politicked, the existence within it becomes unpredictable due to changing rules and procedures (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997; Vygoda, 2000).

Those who seek to avoid political games would tend to emotionally detach from such an uncomfortable context. This is why affective organisational commitment decreases first followed by the decrease in job satisfaction (Chinomona & Mofokeng, 2016; Vygoda, 2000). Bedi and Schat (2013) propose to analyse the link between POP and its outcomes through the lenses of Job Demand-Resource model: a politicked context increases workload and thus leads to the detrimental consequences in terms of workplace attitudes and occupational health.

As to pay-and-promotion POP, it reflects the perception of unfair distribution of organisational resources; which is not based on merit or other explicit principle. When resource allocation is considered arbitrary and unfair, it may be experienced as a shock (Lee & Mitchell, 1994) that leads to the appraisal of one's satisfaction with the current workplace context and further to withdrawal behaviours (Hom et al., 2012). To summarise, general POP concerns the degree of one's emotional attachment to the organisation, while pay-and-promotion POP affects both one's identification and evaluation of the congruence between their expectations and context. The fact that pay-and-promotion POP appears to be a more salient reason for turnover intention in French firefighters may be explained in terms of balance between firefighters' contribution and rewards administered by their Fire department. Social exchange theory provides a valuable explanation of that aspect of POP: when rewards do not appear fair, members consider their organisation as not supportive enough. In contrary, when the quality of exchange is high, one would expect high levels of engagement and positive behaviours towards the organisation (Bukhari & Kamal, 2017).

From the point of view of withdrawal reasons, our results allow better understanding of the forces that may either reinforce or diminish employees' embeddedness into and control over their organisation leading to proximal withdrawal states. According to proximal withdrawal

states theory, POP falls into two categories which are (a) affective forces (fit between the current POP and one's personal values) and (b) embedding HRM practices (when politics are perceived as fair and empowering; Hom et al., 2012). Integrative models can be hardly tested as a whole. Even if not free from limits and shortcuts, every contribution with a narrower focus is useful in terms of development and amendment the entire model. Our study focuses on one type of withdrawal reasons and offers a nuanced understanding the effects of POP, which are relevant to organisational context, onto turnover intention and, thus, looks to solutions beyond the individual level. As regards general POP, they play onto two grounds - as affective forces and embedding HRM practices - at the same time. Firefighters who do not perceive their Fire centre's politics as relevant, fair, or advantageous would tend to withdraw with time. Indeed, in a politically loaded context, employees are constantly seeking to fit into the norms established by a restrained group of powerful individuals, leads to alienation and to coping strategies including increased counterproductive and withdrawal behaviours (Bedi & Schat, 2013).

The focus of pay-and-promotion POP is narrower and relevant to embedding HRM practices. When perceived as unfair pay-and-promotion organisational politics play an important role in the development of withdrawal preferences. As we have already suggested, the mechanism beyond the negative effect of pay-and-promotion POP stems from the principle of equity of social exchange: when firefighters are unaware of how their efforts are rewarded, and how the merit leads to promotion, when they feel rules are not respected, when rewards are irrelevant to their efforts, they uncommit, experience dissatisfaction and finally withdraw. In comparison to the effect of general politics, the clarity and transparency of the career path together with the well-structured reward system are far more predictive of turnover intention in French firefighters.

## **Methodological Implications**

We have validated a reduced French version of the POP scale (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991). The solution obtained is different from the original one (see Supplementary Material). The factor ‘going along to get ahead’ was dropped due to the poor factor loadings and a novel factorial solution. This might be due either to cross-cultural variations of the construct of POP extensively discussed by Bedi and Schat (2013) in their meta-analysis or to the wording of items representative of the culturally contextual verbalisation of the construct (Arce-Ferrer, 2006). At this stage, we propose an eight-item scale including two factors: general politics and pay-and-promotion politics. Further refinement and development of items relevant to the ‘going along to get ahead’ factor can be an opportunity for future research.

## **Practical Implications**

Organisational politics may have equivocal effects. On the one hand, supervisors who are good at politicking may build large networks facilitating access to organisational resources. On the other one, those who do not gain such an access may be subject to favouritism-based pay and promotion decisions (Chang et al., 2009). As our findings show, perception of one’s organisation as highly politicked leads firefighters to envisage quitting. Consequently, future action should aim at decreasing the level of politicking in French fire departments.

In line with the propositions of Vigoda (2000) and Riedel (2011), higher level of employee control over their organisation would help decreasing the negative effects of POP. Given that

both, general and pay-and-promotion POP, have a direct detrimental effect onto affective organisational commitment, we recommend reducing uncertainty in decision making. Knowledge of the organisational procedures and rules together with involvement in the decision-making process would increase incumbents' identification with their organisation.

It is important to note the differentiated character of the effects two POP's dimensions exercise indirectly and directly onto the examined variables. Ferris and colleagues (2019) emphasised the importance of the shift in the POP research towards the dimensional level in order to formulate more specific recommendations. Pay-and-promotion politics, as compared to general politics, better explain turnover intention in French firefighters. Given that pay-and-promotion politics are considered as an aspect of embedding HRM practices in the proximal withdrawal state model (Hom et al., 2012), while general politics are more associated with affective forces, it means that reviewing existing HRM procedures and rules is far more efficient than shaping a new organisational strategy. We argue that, in regard with general politics, improved distribution of decisional power, its de-concentration would contribute to the perception of Fire departments as flat, open and granting power to its members and, thus, prevent future withdrawal. We believe that improving pay-and-promotion politics may have quick enough and visible results, because this POP dimension appears more salient in terms of turnover intention prediction, but is also more malleable. It is necessary to augment the transparency of HRM practices at different stages from recruitment to performance appraisal and promotion. We expect that clear communication and explanation of procedures and criteria might reduce perception of fire departments as highly politicked. With collectively defined and transparent decision firefighters would easier identify with their fire department and to consider it as relevant to their expectations. The social exchange explanation of the effect of pay-and-promotion POP onto turnover intention (Bukhari & Kamal, 2017; Ferris et al., 2019) make us

believe that the evaluation of the expectations that firefighters have in terms of the speed of progression and reward for any given type of activity (like bushfire, personal assistance or traffic accident) may help decreasing the perception of inequality of social exchange between firefighters and their fire centre.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The findings of the present study should be taken with caution due to its cross-sectional design and its sample size. Even though the order of effects observed in the present study is similar to results previously found in the same context (Burakova et al., 2014), the evidence would benefit from additional replications to confirm a three-order causal model with a longitudinal design. We would also encourage future researchers to use the French POP scale with the two-dimensional structure to gather further evidence for its validity.

POP's consequences in the public sector with a high job security can differ from the outcomes in the private sector (Vigoda, 2000). Instead of high level of turnover intention, public sector employees, who consider their organisations as too politicised, may adopt other withdrawal behaviours, such as counter-productive behaviour and absenteeism. In a future study, we hope to contrast the effect of POP on different forms of organisational withdrawal including absenteeism and dysfunctional behaviours as indicators of organization level outcomes. Yet taken together, our findings make a call to promote nuanced understanding to political considerations. Concrete interventions increasing transparency and inclusiveness in French fire departments need to be developed in order to prevent firefighters from quitting, and should be evaluated taking into account antecedents, reasons and also personal characteristics, such as

levels of engagement or personal preferences such as personality to take an even fuller interactionist perspective than the current study.

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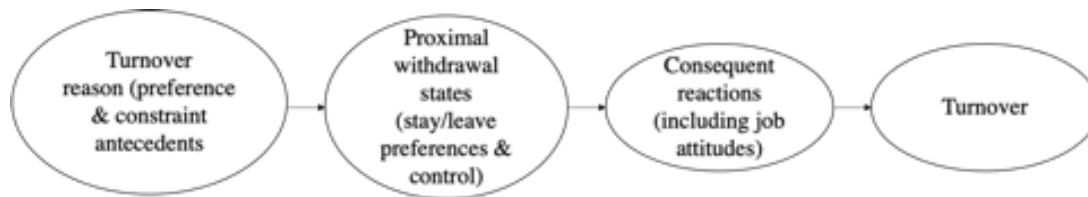


Figure 1. *Generic model of turnover antecedents and reasons (after the Theory of proximal withdrawal states (Hom et al., 2012)).*

Table 1.

*Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations,  $\alpha$ -Cronbach and  $\omega$ -McDonald for study variables*

	Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	General POP	2.99	.91	(.85)						
2	Pay & promotion POP	3.77	.74	.47**	(.70)					
3	Affective commitment	3.15	1.03	-.40**	-.36**	(.90)				
4	Job satisfaction	3.87	1.43	-.36**	-.52**	.69**	(.90)			
5	Turnover intention	1.98	.85	.39**	.21**	-.53**	-.59**	(.88)		
6	Age	42.18	9.50	.09	.02	.06	.03	.02	-	
7	Service length	14.93	9.80	.25**	.01	.06	.04	.08	.63**	-

*NB.* M = mean; SD = standard deviation; \* -  $p < .05$ ; \*\* -  $p < .01$ . For the unidimensional scales (job satisfaction and turnover intention), reliability is reported as  $\alpha$ -Cronbach. For the multidimensional scales (POP and organisational commitment), reliability is reported as  $\omega$ -McDonald.

Table 2.

*Comparison of three mediation models of the turnover intention antecedents.*

N°	Model	$\chi^2/df$ (p)	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	R <sup>2</sup>
1	Job satisfaction and organisational commitment are both direct antecedents	427.06/203 (<.01)	.97	.06 (.06; .08)	.08	.44
2	Organisational commitment is direct antecedent, job satisfaction is mediated by organisational commitment	377.73/203 (<.01)	.98	.06 (.05; .07)	.07	.37
3	Job satisfaction is direct antecedent, organisational commitment is fully mediated by job satisfaction	346.29/203 (<.01)	.98	.05 (.04; .06)	.06	.45

Nota bene.  $\chi^2/df$  = Chi-square/degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error approximation; SRMR = standardised root mean residual; R<sup>2</sup> concerns the criterion variable 'intention to leave'.

Table 3.

*Results of the model test*

Criterion variable	B	$\beta$
Turnover intention, R <sup>2</sup> = .45		
Job satisfaction	-.67	-.67
Job satisfaction, R <sup>2</sup> = .66		
Affective commitment	.60	.60
Pay & promotion POP	-.31	-.31
Affective commitment, R <sup>2</sup> = .24		
General POP	-.34	-.34
Pay & promotion POP	-.23	-.23
$\chi^2(df) = 346.29/203$ ; RMSEA = .05 (.04; .06); CFI = .98; NNFI = .98; SRMR = .06.		

NB. B - non-standardised coefficient;  $\beta$  - standardised coefficient; only statistically significant results are reported ( $T \geq 1.96$  or  $T \leq -1.96$ ).



Figure 2. *Empirical model of the POP outcomes in a French fire department*