

# Why do People Stay in Their Jobs? Perceived Organizational Support, Meaningful Work, and the Intention to Stay in the Organization

Daniela RUSU-MOCĂNAȘU<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This study investigates the relationships between Perceived Organizational Support (POS), Meaningful Work (MW), and the Intention to Stay in the organization (ITS), through a selective narrative review of the literature. It examines bidirectional mediation effects, considering MW as a mediator between POS and ITS, and POS as a mediator between MW and ITS. The study also introduces a conceptual matrix depicting four scenarios based on high and low levels of POS and MW, and their influence on employees' intention to stay. Evidence from the literature highlights that POS and MW play complementary and interdependent roles in shaping ITS. The analysis provides an integrated perspective with implications for theory and practice, particularly for organizational retention strategies.

**Keywords:** *Perceived Organizational Support; Meaningful Work; Intention to Stay; Intention to Leave; Employee Retention; Turnover Intention;*

## 1. Introduction

The pursuit of meaningful work, which provides employees with a sense of purpose and fulfillment, has become a central aspect of job satisfaction and overall well-being (Duffy et al., 2014). In a context characterized by rapid organizational changes, globalization, and increasing competitive pressures, organizations face a significant challenge: retaining valuable employees. High turnover rates directly affect productivity and performance, as well as the morale of remaining staff and the quality of relationships with clients and partners (Johari et al., 2012; Sippel-Tompkins, 2025).

Recent transformations in the organizational environment—such as restructuring, mergers, flattened hierarchies, and increased work flexibility—have generated both objective effects (e.g., stress, uncertainty, and loss of stability) and subjective consequences, such as a decline in employees' trust in the organization. In this context, Perceived Organizational Support (POS) plays a critical role, as it

---

<sup>1</sup> PhD, Senior Lecturer, "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galați, Romania, E-mail: [daniela.rusu@ugal.ro](mailto:daniela.rusu@ugal.ro)

can buffer the negative effects of such changes and enhance employees' intention to stay (ITS) (Cartwright, & Holmes, 2006). Concurrently, the perception of work as meaningful (MW) contributes to job satisfaction, engagement, and professional identity, offering employees a sense of purpose and belonging (Frankl, 1984; Chalofsky, 2003; Cartwright, & Holmes, 2006).

Research indicates that MW and POS operate in a complementary and interdependent manner. Although the absence of one factor can be partially compensated by the other, the simultaneous presence of both factors maximizes employee engagement and the intention to stay (ITS) (Cartwright, & Holmes, 2006; Haryadi et al., 2025). Therefore, creating an organizational environment that supports and recognizes employees, while offering opportunities to experience meaningful work, is essential for enhancing retention and fostering a positive organizational climate (Cho et al., 2009).

Within this framework, the study examines the relationships between POS, MW, and ITS, with a focus on bidirectional mediation effects: MW as a mediator between POS and ITS, and POS as a mediator between MW and ITS. In addition, the study proposes a four-quadrant conceptual matrix illustrating how different combinations of POS and MW levels influence employees' intention to stay.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### ***2.1. Meaningful Work: Definitions and Its Impact on Engagement and Intention to Stay***

Meaningful work (MW) represents the employee's perception of the purpose and value of their activities and constitutes a central dimension of intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction (Steger et al., 2012). The concept goes beyond the mere completion of tasks, encompassing the positive evaluation of work's contribution to higher values and to the individual's personal development (Elangovan et al., 2022; Chalofsky, 2003).

When professional goals align with personal values, employees demonstrate greater involvement and commitment (Doan et al., 2020). Studies confirm that perceiving work as meaningful positively influences well-being and intention to stay (ITS). Peer recognition and the sense of personal contribution reduce turnover intention, while MW exerts an indirect effect on ITS through job satisfaction (Charles-Leija et al., 2023; Haryadi et al., 2025). Moreover, perceiving work as a calling or as having a higher purpose has been associated with voluntary engagement, discretionary hours, and increased satisfaction (Dik & Duffy, 2009).

The importance of MW is reflected at both the individual and organizational levels: it supports psychological well-being, job satisfaction, team cohesion, and employee retention, while reducing organizational cynicism (Steger et al., 2012). A lack of recognition and value incongruence generates frustration, disengagement, and turnover intention (Elangovan et al., 2022). Conceptually, MW has been

described as a mediating psychological state between job characteristics—such as skill variety, task identity, and task significance—and organizational outcomes (Steger et al., 2012), being positively correlated with employee engagement and well-being (Sánchez-Cardona et al., 2021). Job resources—including competence, autonomy, support, and recognition—reduce exhaustion and turnover intention while fostering commitment (Jourdain, & Chênevert, 2010).

The pursuit of MW, characterized by a sense of purpose and fulfillment, is crucial for employee satisfaction and well-being, contributing to organizational commitment, performance, and retention (Sippel-Tompkins, 2025). The extent to which employees value dignity and their occupation, along with perceptions of dehumanization or exhaustion, can predict turnover intention (Heleno et al., 2018). Moreover, MW indirectly influences the intention to stay through job satisfaction, confirming its mediating role (Haryadi et al., 2025).

The literature highlights the distinction between meaning in work and meaning at work (Elangovan et al., 2022). The experience of meaning can be both positive and negative: at times, work is associated with alienation and cynicism. However, employees who perceive a personal purpose in their activity are less likely to intend to leave the organization (Moncarz et al., 2009, as cited in Hu Qian et al., 2024).

In conclusion, MW is an important predictor of ITS, acting both directly and indirectly through satisfaction and engagement. Perceived organizational support (POS) serves as a reinforcing factor in this process. The experience of meaningful work does not occur in isolation; it is shaped by perceived organizational support, which reinforces motivation and the intention to stay. In the following section, we analyze the role of POS in this context.

## ***2.2. Perceived Organizational Support – Definitions and Impact on Retention***

Perceived organizational support (POS) reflects employees' perception that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Based on social exchange theory, the concept represents employees' belief that the organization recognizes their value and provides support, both through policies and practices and through their relationship with supervisors (Erogluer et al., 2020).

Research indicates that POS enhances job satisfaction, engagement, and intention to stay (ITS). Employees who perceive high POS are less likely to leave the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1990). Supervisors play a key role, as their actions are perceived as representing the organization's intent (Levinson, 1965, as cited in Erogluer et al., 2020), and their perceived support is strongly associated with POS, influencing satisfaction and retention intentions.

POS influences turnover intention both directly and indirectly through job satisfaction, work-life balance, and engagement (Duong & Ho, 2024). Haryadi et al.

(2025) report a positive association between POS and retention, highlighting its protective role against burnout. Socio-emotional support and respect are more valuable than material benefits in reducing turnover intention (Uzoğlu, 2005, as cited in Eroğlu et al., 2020).

Recent evidence suggests a bidirectional relationship between POS and MW: POS supports the perception of work as meaningful through recognition, autonomy, and development support (Jolly et al., 2021; Haryadi et al., 2025), while MW reinforces the perception of support, an interaction that contributes to increased ITS (Duong, & Ho, 2024).

In conclusion, POS is a robust predictor of ITS, influencing employees' decision to remain both directly and indirectly through enhanced satisfaction, engagement, and perceptions of meaningful work. The bidirectional POS–MW relationship underscores the central role of POS in explaining employees' intention to stay in the organization.

### ***2.3. Intention to Stay in the Organization: Definitions and Determinants***

The intention to stay in the organization (ITS) represents a complex, multidimensional phenomenon encompassing multiple levels, including both internal psychological processes and observable behaviors. It ranges from simple forms, such as not seeking alternative employment, to elaborate internal processes involving motivations, organizational attachment, personal values, and perceptions of stability. Therefore, ITS cannot be reduced to a single dimension and requires a comprehensive approach to be understood and leveraged in organizational strategies (Qian et al., 2024).

Theoretically, intention is considered a behavior still in the cognitive stage, anticipating actual action (Ajzen, & Fishbein, 1980, as cited in Eroğlu et al., 2020). Within this framework, the intention to stay reflects employees' intention to continue working in the current organization over the long term and has been defined as employees' plan to maintain the employment relationship with their employer for an extended period (Shahid, 2018; Johari et al., 2012; Jang et al., 2023). In traditional literature, ITS was long treated as the opposite of the intention to leave (ITL), with the two terms often used interchangeably (Cho et al., 2009). Employees who do not develop this intention or who express an intention to leave the organization are likely to do so in the near future (Achmad et al., 2023; Eroğlu et al., 2020).

Recent research proposes more nuanced perspectives. In traditional approaches, the intention to stay was viewed as merely the absence of the desire to leave the organization, emphasizing the passive dimension of retention: the employee stays until a reason to leave arises, without an active voluntary dimension (Aisyah, 2022). In this paradigm, ITS and ITL were considered two sides of the same coin, considered strong predictors of actual turnover behavior (Cho et al., 2009).

Classical definitions focused on long-term contractual continuity without capturing an active voluntary component (Shahid, 2018; Johari et al., 2012; Achmad et al., 2023).

A perspective grounded in positive psychology treats the intention to stay as an active and positive attitude toward the organization, expressing a voluntary desire and dedication to continue working and contributing (Aisyah, 2022). In this sense, ITS is not merely the absence of the intention to leave but reflects conscious commitment and intrinsic motivation (Duong, & Ho, 2024).

A more recent perspective clearly distinguishes between ITL and ITS, arguing that while correlated, they are distinct constructs. Reducing the intention to leave does not automatically increase the intention to stay, as each construct has specific determinants and consequences (Cho et al., 2009). Empirical studies support this view, showing, for example, that perceived organizational support has a positive direct impact on ITS but does not always affect ITL to the same extent (Johnston, 1995).

The determinants of the intention to stay encompass individual, organizational, and external factors that shape the employee's decision to continue the employment relationship. Individual factors include motivation, job satisfaction, commitment, and alignment of personal values with organizational values. At the organizational and job level, perceptions of organizational support, climate, leadership, rewards, recognition, autonomy, and working conditions directly influence employees' perceptions of the organization. Externally, alternative labor market opportunities and general employment conditions can enhance or diminish the intention to stay, shaping a more favorable or restrictive decision-making context (Qian et al., 2024; Erogluer et al., 2020; Shahid, 2018).

Empirical studies confirm that perceived organizational support and job satisfaction increase the intention to stay, while a reduction in the intention to leave does not automatically translate into a stronger desire to stay (Johnston, 1995; Haryadi et al., 2025). Johnston showed that a high level of organizational support increases the likelihood that employees will continue their activity within the organization, whereas its absence fosters the intention to leave. Research by Cho and colleagues (2009) highlighted the need to analyze the intention to stay as a distinct phenomenon. Other studies confirm the multidimensional nature of ITS, simultaneously influenced by individual traits, the organizational environment, and external labor market conditions (Qian et al., 2004). In sectors such as hospitality, employees experiencing high job satisfaction and consistent organizational support demonstrate active willingness to continue, commitment, and dedication (Cho et al., 2009; Haryadi et al., 2025).

The modern differentiated approach supports the view that the intention to stay is a construct distinct from the intention to leave, even if correlations exist between them. The practical implications are significant: policies aimed solely at

reducing turnover do not guarantee an increase in voluntary, active retention; interventions that stimulate intrinsic motivation and employees' desire to continue working are necessary. In this sense, the intention to stay should be understood as an active and voluntary dimension of commitment, directly impacting retention, performance, and satisfaction. Integrating perceived organizational support and the experience of meaningful work thus becomes essential for strengthening ITS.

Therefore, the intention to stay in the organization is now understood not merely as a reflex of the lack of alternatives, but as a complex construct at the intersection of individual, organizational, and contextual factors. The conceptual evolution from a passive to an active and differentiated perspective highlights ITS as a distinct and essential indicator for sustainable employee retention.

### 3. Mediation Between Perceived Organizational Support, Meaningful Work, and Intention to Stay

Understanding retention requires exploring the mediating relationships among POS, MW, and ITS. The first hypothesis considers MW as a mediator between POS and ITS: perceived organizational support enhances motivation and attachment, which enhances the perception of work as meaningful, thereby increasing the intention to stay. A second hypothesis proposes POS as a mediator between MW and ITS: the experience of meaningful work strengthens the perception of organizational support, thus reinforcing ITS.

To synthesize these relationships, we propose a conceptual matrix with four quadrants, corresponding to combinations of high and low levels of POS and MW. This provides a clear representation of possible scenarios and allows visualization of how variations in the two dimensions influence ITS. The analysis is strictly limited to the variables under investigation (POS, MW, and ITS), avoiding speculative extrapolations (see Table 1). The matrix is a conceptual model, not the result of an empirical study.

Table 1. Interaction of POS and MW and Their Influence on the Intention to Stay

	High MW	Low MW
High MW	Quadrant 1 – Ideal Case: The employee perceives both organizational support and meaningful work; ITS is maximized.	Quadrant 2 – Fragile Case: Work is perceived as meaningful, but organizational support is low; ITS is moderate, dependent on increased POS.
Low MW	Quadrant 3 – Paradoxical Case: High organizational support, but work is not perceived as meaningful; ITS is moderate, influenced mainly by POS.	Quadrant 4 – Critical Case: Both components are lacking; ITS is very low, high risk of leaving.

*Source: author's own elaboration*

The description of the quadrants clarifies the differences: in Quadrant 1, the combination of organizational support and personal meaning generates intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction, loyalty, and maximal ITS. In Quadrant 2, the lack of support erodes the benefits of meaningful work, making retention fragile. In Quadrant 3, organizational support partially compensates for the absence of meaning, maintaining moderate ITS. In Quadrant 4, the absence of both dimensions generates vulnerability and a high risk of leaving, requiring organizational interventions.

Thus, the matrix provides an analytical tool that synthesizes how POS and MW combine to influence ITS, highlighting the non-linear and bidirectional nature of these relationships, which warrants further investigation. The literature confirms the role of both variables in retention, but cultural and occupational differences suggest the need for in-depth empirical studies to validate these mechanisms.

#### **4. Conclusions and Implications**

This study explored the relationships between perceived organizational support (POS), meaningful work (MW), and intention to stay in the organization (ITS), highlighting both the individual effects of each variable and their bidirectional interaction. The narrative literature review demonstrated that both POS and MW directly and indirectly influence employees' intention to stay by enhancing job satisfaction, engagement, and sense of belonging. The experience of meaningful work amplifies the effect of organizational support, while the perception of organizational support reinforces the pursuit of meaning at work, generating a complementary retention mechanism.

The four-quadrant conceptual matrix provided a clear representation of how combinations of POS and MW levels influence the intention to stay: from the "ideal case," characterized by the presence of both dimensions and maximal retention intention, to the "critical case," in which the absence of both dimensions generates a high risk of leaving. This framework underscores the importance of an integrated and proactive approach to strengthening retention, highlighting that reducing the intention to leave does not automatically equate to an increase in the intention to stay.

##### *Practical Implications*

- Organizations should develop policies and practices that reinforce employees' perception of their value and support their well-being and professional development.
- Redesigning work and creating opportunities for employees to identify personal meaning in their daily activities can stimulate engagement and retention.
- Continuous feedback, recognition of contributions, and socio-emotional support are essential elements for creating an organizational climate favorable to retention.

- Integrated strategies should simultaneously address both the psychological dimension (MW) and the organizational dimension (POS) to maximize effects on the intention to stay.

#### *Limitations and Future Directions*

This narrative review focuses exclusively on the relationships among POS, MW, and ITS and does not include direct empirical analyses or other organizational and contextual variables that may influence retention. Future research could test the proposed conceptual matrix using quantitative, cross-cultural, or longitudinal methods to evaluate the generalizability and robustness of the identified mechanisms. Investigating additional factors, such as leadership, organizational culture, or career growth opportunities, could complement the comprehensive understanding of the intention to stay.

In conclusion, integrating perceived organizational support and meaningful work represents a strategic tool essential for enhancing employee retention, benefiting both individuals and long-term organizational performance. The bidirectional approach to the relationships among POS, MW, and ITS offers an innovative and practically applicable perspective on how organizations can cultivate a sustainable and motivating work environment.

#### **References**

- Achmad, L. I., Noermijati, N., Rofiaty, R., & Wirawan Irawanto, D. (2023). Job satisfaction and employee engagement as mediators of the relationship between talent development and intention to stay in Generation Z workers. *International Journal of Professional Business Review*, Miami, 8(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2023.v8i1.814>
- Aisyah, F., & Muftia Khoirunnisa, R. (2022). Effect of Training, Career development, Compensation, and Performance Appraisal On Employee Intention To Stay. In Bima Cinintya Pratama et al. (eds.). *ICBAE 2022. Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference of Business, Accounting, and Economics*. 869-875. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4108/eai.10-8-2022.2320822>
- Cartwright, S., & Holmes, N. (2006). The meaning of work: The challenge of regaining employee engagement and reducing cynicism. *Human Resource Management Review*, 16 (2006), 199–208. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmmr.2006.03.012>
- Chalofsky, N. (2003). An emerging construct of meaningful work? *Human Resource Development International*, 6(1), 69-83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1367886022000016785>
- Charles-Leija, H., Castro, C. G., Toledo, M., & Ballesteros-Valdés, R. (2023). Meaningful Work, Happiness at Work, and Turnover Intentions. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(4), 3565. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20043565>
- Cho, S., Johanson, M.M., & Guchait, P. (2009). Employees intent to leave: A comparison of



- determinants of intent to leave versus intent to stay. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 28(3), 374-381.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2008.10.007>
- Dik, B.J., & Duffy, R.D. (2009). Calling and vocation at work: Definitions and prospects for research and practice. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 37, 424-450.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000008316430>
- Duong, C.H., & Ho, Y.H. (2024). Perceived organizational support and its impact on employee's intention to stay: Dataset from the electronics industry in Vietnam. *Data in Brief*, 54(2024)110428 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>
- Duffy, R.D., Allan, B.A., Autin, K.L., & Douglass, R.P. (2014). Living a calling and work well-being: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 61(4), 605-615.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000042>
- Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Huntchinson, S., & Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived Organizational Support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71(3), 500-507.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.71.3.500>
- Eisenberger, R., Fasolo, P., & Davis-LaMastro, V. (1990). Perceived organizational and employee diligence, commitment, and innovation. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75(1), 51-59. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.75.1.51>
- Elangovan, A.R., Kar, A., & Steink, C. (2022). Meaningful moves: A meaning-based view of nurses' turnover. *Health Services Management Research*, 35(1), 48-56.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/09514848211010427>
- Eroğlu, K., Bekmezci, M., & Orcanli, K. (2020). The Mediating Effect of Subjective Career Success in the Impact of Perceived Organizational Support on the Intention to Remain. *Journal of Business and Management*, 8(5), 2205-2225.  
<http://doi.org/10.4236/ojbm.2020.85135>
- Frankl, V.E. (1984). *Man's search for meaning* (3rd ed.). New York: Pocket Books.
- Haryadi, Y.I., Sariwulan, R.T., & Parimita, W. (2025). The Influence of Perceived Organizational Support and Meaningful Work on Turnover Intention Through Job Satisfaction as an Intervening Variable. *International Journal of Social Discussion*, 2(2), 110-125. <https://doi.org/10.59613/ijds.v2i2.8>  
<http://ijds.seevalue.org/index.php/ijds/index>
- Heleno, C., Borges, L., & Agulló-Tomás, E. (2018). The meaning of work as a predictor of the intention to remain/leave among teachers. *Revista de Administração Mackenzie*, 19(spe). <http://doi.org/10.1590/1678-6971/eRAMD180017>
- Jang, R., Lee, W.S., & Moon, J. (2023). Determinants of Attitude and the Intention to Stay of Employees in Low-Cost Carriers: Using Justice Theory. *Sustainability*, 15, 8895.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su15118895>
- Johari, J., Yean, T.F., Adrian, Z., Yahya, K.K., & Ahmad, M.N. (2012). Promoting employee intention to stay: Do human resource management practices matter. *International Journal of Economics and Management*, 6(2), 396-416.  
<http://www.ijem.upm.edu.my/vol6no2/bab10.pdf>
- Jolly, P.M., McDowell, C., Dawson, M., & Abbot, J. (2021). Pay and benefit satisfaction, perceived organizational support, and turnover intentions: The moderating role of job variety. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 95 (2021) 102921.  
[www.elsevier.com/locate/ijhm](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/ijhm)

- Johnston, J. (1995). The determinants of service quality: satisfiers and dissatisfiers. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 6(5), 53-71. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09564239510101536>
- Jourdain, G., & Chênevert, D. (2010). Job demands-resources, burnout and intention to leave the nursing profession. A questionnaire survey. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 47(6), 709-722. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2009.11.007>
- Qian, H., & Balwi, M.K.B.M. (2024). Understanding the Complexity of Intention to Stay: Influencing Factors and Strategic Insights for Enhancing Employee Retention. *Advances in Economics, Management and Political Sciences*, 93, 129-135, <http://doi.org/10.54254/2754-1169/93/20241126>.
- Sánchez-Cardona, I., Vera, M., & Marrero-Centeno, J.J. (2021). Job resources and employees' intention to stay: The mediating role of meaningful work and work engagement. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 29(5), <http://www.doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2021.10>
- Shahid, A. (2018). Employee Intention to Stay: An Environment Based on Trust and Motivation. *Journal of Management Research*, 10, 57-71. <https://doi.org/10.5296/jmr.v10i4.13680>
- Sippel-Tompkins, J. (2025). Factors Contributing to Meaningful Work and Intention to Stay in Generation Z Healthcare Workers. [Doctoral dissertation, Southeastern University]. Fire Scholars. <https://firescholars.seu.edu/org-lead/56>
- Steger, M.F., Dick, B.J., & Duffy, R.D. (2012). Measuring Meaningful Work: The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI). *Journal of Career Assessment*, 20(3) 322-337. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072711436160>