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Normative Commitment as a Boundary Condition in the Engagement–Turnover Intention Relationship among SMEs in Lebanon

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Abstract

Employee turnover remains a persistent challenge for organizations worldwide, with intention to leave recognized as its strongest predictor. Yet, the factors that shape employees' withdrawal intentions continue to receive limited empirical attention. This study addresses this gap by surveying 56 Lebanese SMEs using a quantitative, empirical design. Guided by the job demands–resources framework, the research investigates how employee engagement and normative commitment interact to influence intention to leave. The results offer novel empirical evidence demonstrating that normative commitment significantly moderates the engagement–turnover intention relationship, ultimately diminishing employees' intentions to quit. This study enhances understanding of the dynamics between employee engagement and normative commitment within Lebanese SMEs, especially amid the post-pandemic work context. The discussion outlines practical implications and methodological limitations, emphasizing the importance of reconsidering these findings in light of the evolving “new normal” following Covid-19. Overall, the study provides valuable insights for organizations seeking to mitigate employee turnover and highlights promising avenues for future research.

Keywords: Turnover intention, Employee engagement, Intention to leave, Normative commitment, Human resource management (HRM)

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Introduction

Employee turnover continues to be a pressing concern for organizations, as high departure rates generate additional burdens such as the need for extensive recruitment and training [1, 2]. Despite advances in technology and the increasing reliance on artificial intelligence, human capital remains the principal resource underpinning organizational functioning [3]. Because employees' performance is closely tied to an organization's competitiveness, ensuring that workers feel supported, skilled, and motivated has become a central objective of modern management [4]. Consequently, understanding what drives employee motivation is an essential task for both practitioners and scholars [3].

The intention to leave (ITL) is widely regarded as the strongest precursor of actual turnover [2] and represents a critical indicator used in assessing the effectiveness of human resource strategies [5]. Although research has acknowledged that numerous factors shape employees' decisions to consider leaving, these determinants—particularly those connected to adverse workplace conditions—remain insufficiently explored [4]. Among the key antecedents, employee engagement (EE) [6] and normative commitment (NC) [7] have long been recognized as major influences on turnover intentions. Nevertheless, empirical work explaining *how* affective constructs such as EE translate into ITL is limited. This study directly responds to scholarly calls encouraging further investigation into the mechanisms that provoke turnover intentions [8].

To address this gap, the study adopts the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory [9], which provides a comprehensive framework for explaining how engagement develops and how it affects outcomes such as ITL [10]. The proposed model



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integrates EE and NC to advance understanding of the psychological processes influencing ITL. Although EE has historically been associated with improved satisfaction, productivity, financial performance, and reduced turnover [11], the post-pandemic work environment necessitates renewed evaluation of these relationships. Lebanon's prolonged economic crisis, intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, has severely constrained organizational resilience [12]. The pandemic further strained Lebanese SMEs by reducing consumer demand and forcing temporary shutdowns [13], placing these firms under unprecedented pressures.

As a result, organizations have been compelled to adopt new hybrid work systems [14, 15] and reconsider how they sustain engagement in transformed workplaces [14]. This study contributes to the limited body of research conducted within Middle Eastern contexts by testing the hypothesis that normative commitment moderates the negative relationship between employee engagement and intention to leave. The findings confirm that NC significantly strengthens the association, offering new insight into how turnover intentions form [8]. Although NC has been widely treated as an antecedent of ITL, its moderating role—particularly within the Lebanese SME landscape—has not been examined. Beyond its theoretical contributions, the study provides practical guidance for managers seeking to simultaneously enhance EE and NC to reduce turnover and improve employee retention.

Literature review

Employee turnover presents an ongoing challenge for organizations across sectors [4], even as employees continue to be viewed as the organization's most critical resource. The increasing difficulty in effectively managing human talent has contributed to an escalation in turnover rates [4]. Prior studies have identified multiple drivers of employees' intentions to leave [16], including the intention itself [17], engagement levels, and organizational commitment. These factors play a crucial role in reducing ITL and, ultimately, actual departures [16]. However, their antecedents and consequences have not been thoroughly investigated [4], creating a need for expanded inquiry. The present study responds to this gap by examining the combined effects of the proposed variables within a single conceptual model, thereby extending current understanding of the determinants of turnover intentions in line with recommendations for future research [8].

The Utrecht Group conceptualizes employee engagement as a positive, fulfilling psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in work tasks [18, 19]. Engaged employees tend to demonstrate high levels of energy, enthusiasm, and cognitive-emotional involvement, which contribute to improved organizational performance [20]. Intention to leave, frequently referred to as turnover intention [2, 7], reflects an employee's deliberate consideration of leaving an organization in search of better employment opportunities [21]. As ITL consistently emerges as the most reliable predictor of actual turnover [2, 7], organizations must identify the determinants that increase or reduce employees' willingness to exit. Understanding these drivers enables organizations to intervene early and mitigate turnover risks [22, 23].

Employee engagement and intention to leave

The present study conceptualizes intention to leave (ITL) as a downstream result of employee engagement (EE). Although a substantial portion of EE research has emphasized its role in driving high performance [14], other work shows that engaged employees are also less inclined to consider leaving their jobs [24, 25]. This reduction in ITL can translate into considerable advantages for organizations [26, 27]. Maintaining strong engagement is therefore important not only for employee welfare, but also for broader organizational outcomes such as productivity, financial indicators, customer satisfaction, and operational functioning [28, 29]. Moreover, EE has been repeatedly tied to improved well-being, life satisfaction, and workplace efficiency [20, 30, 31].

However, the accumulated evidence regarding EE was produced largely before the disruptions caused by COVID-19. Many countries implemented mechanisms to reduce the pandemic's economic impact, yet Lebanon's prolonged financial crisis severely limited its ability to respond [12]. Lebanese SMEs in particular faced drastic drops in demand and were forced into temporary closures, which magnified existing vulnerabilities [13]. Consequently, these firms are operating under historically difficult circumstances. The pandemic also compelled organizations globally to shift to hybrid work structures, requiring new approaches to sustaining engagement [14]. Because the existing research offers limited guidance for such contexts, additional studies on EE in hybrid and crisis-ridden environments are necessary (p. 76).

Normative commitment

Organizational commitment (OC) refers to how employees psychologically relate to their organization [32, 33] and has implications for outcomes across individual and organizational levels [34]. It shapes employees' attachment to the organization and inversely predicts their inclination to leave [35]. Meyer and Allen [32] conceptualized OC as consisting of affective, instrumental, and normative components that can operate simultaneously. Affective commitment captures emotional identification, instrumental commitment concerns perceived costs of quitting, and normative commitment (NC) involves remaining with the organization due to a sense of duty or moral responsibility [7, 35, 36]. NC tends to develop when employees

internalize organizational values through socialization processes, resulting in loyalty and a belief that staying is the right or expected course of action [33].

The moderating role of normative commitment

A robust body of empirical evidence indicates that OC influences employees' ITL [7]. Prior studies have linked job satisfaction to lower ITL [35] and demonstrated that NC, in particular, is consistently associated with reduced turnover intentions [37, 38]. Individuals with strong NC often remain with their employer because they feel a moral or ethical obligation to do so [39, 40]. When employees perceive that their employer has supported or invested in them, the sense of obligation tends to strengthen [41]. Recent evidence from hospital settings further confirms NC's significant negative impact on ITL [7]. In such cases, employees express both gratitude and responsibility toward their organization, reinforcing their desire to stay [35].

EE has also been tied to commitment, including its normative dimension [39, 42]. Employees who feel engaged are more likely to experience heightened NC, as positive work attitudes can enhance feelings of loyalty and diminish turnover intentions [39]. This aligns with the notion that EE and NC are interrelated factors that jointly contribute to lower ITL [32].

Theoretical background and hypothesis development

Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework, this study develops a tailored conceptual model to deepen understanding of how the focal variables interact. This responds directly to recent calls for further examination of the mechanisms that shape employees' intentions to leave their organizations [8]. Since its introduction by Demerouti *et al.* [9], the JD-R model has become a predominant lens for analyzing employee engagement (EE) as a psychological condition [43], in part because it offers a comprehensive structure for examining how engagement emerges and how it influences outcomes [10, 14].

In JD-R theory, resources—whether internal or work-related—serve as motivational drivers that enable engagement and promote desirable outcomes such as improved well-being and enhanced performance [43]. By contrast, job demands require sustained effort and, over time, can deplete energy and lead to detrimental consequences, including strain or withdrawal [14, 18]. Such demands may involve workload, temporal pressures, shift requirements, or physical and environmental conditions [14]. When engagement is strong, employees tend to exhibit adaptability, creativity, productivity, and commitment—often accompanied by lower absenteeism and reduced turnover intentions [14].

Prior studies reinforce this positive profile of engaged employees. Workers who are deeply absorbed in their roles and who demonstrate strong commitment are less likely to consider leaving their organizations [2]. Evidence from Lebanon further supports this dynamic: organizational commitment and engagement have been shown to diminish intention to leave within Lebanese SMEs [44], and engagement is linked to both higher job satisfaction and reduced turnover [45, 46]. Highly engaged employees often experience pride in their roles, exhibit greater productivity, and willingly extend their efforts beyond formal job requirements [47]. Given these patterns, engagement tends to exert a substantial negative effect on turnover intentions, and normative commitment (NC) may amplify this relationship.

Consistent with JD-R, insufficient job resources can undermine engagement [14], which corresponds with findings such as those of Zoughaib *et al.* [46], who reported that disengaged frontline employees are more inclined to leave their organizations, whereas engaged employees generally prefer to stay. Engaged employees typically develop strong loyalty and a sense of obligation toward their organization, thereby making external job opportunities less attractive [6, 26].

Taken together, these theoretical and empirical observations support the expectation that NC serves as a boundary condition that alters the strength of the engagement–turnover relationship. Specifically, the study anticipates that NC reinforces the negative effect of EE on intention to leave.

Hypothesis 1: Normative commitment moderates the negative relationship between employee engagement and intention to leave.

Materials and Methods

A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed to examine the proposed model (**Figure 1**). Survey questionnaires were distributed to employees working in Lebanese SMEs, provided they had at least one year of tenure. The study followed a positivist and deductive approach, relying on numerical analysis and empirical procedures to test the hypothesized relationships.

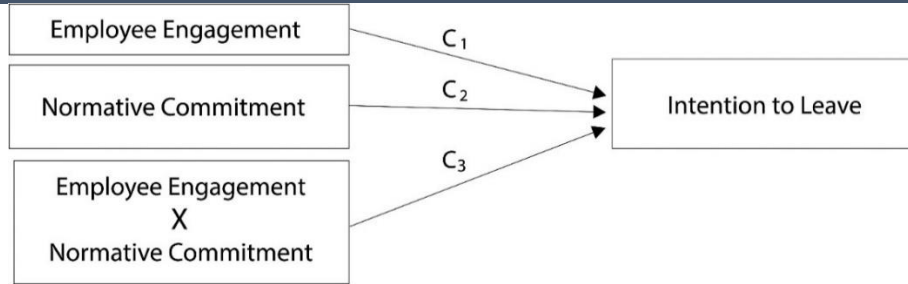


Figure 1. Statistical model to test.

Contextual Background: SMEs in Lebanon

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a critical role in sustaining economic development worldwide, given their ability to generate employment, stimulate innovation, and contribute substantially to gross domestic product. In Lebanon, SMEs dominate the business landscape, comprising over 90% of registered companies and providing more than half of total employment. The performance and stability of these enterprises are therefore closely linked to the overall economic health of the nation. However, in recent years, Lebanese SMEs have faced extraordinary challenges due to the convergence of financial instability, political turbulence, and public health crises. Events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut Port explosion in 2020 have exacerbated these difficulties, negatively impacting business operations, employee well-being, and organizational sustainability.

Research indicates that the cumulative effects of these crises have significantly undermined employee productivity and engagement, with heightened inflation further limiting the capacity of SMEs to retain skilled staff. The inability to maintain a motivated workforce threatens not only operational continuity but also the reputation and market trust of these enterprises. As SMEs in Lebanon navigate this uncertain environment, human resource management practices that align organizational objectives with employee needs have become increasingly vital for fostering workforce stability, engagement, and retention. The focus on Lebanese SMEs is particularly pertinent due to their central contribution to national economic development and the unique pressures they face in the current socio-economic context. Employee turnover has long been a critical concern, but its implications are amplified in environments where support and organizational resources are limited. Employees are a primary source of competitive advantage, and maintaining their engagement is essential for ensuring organizational performance, productivity, and long-term success. Evidence shows that engaged employees are more likely to remain committed, contribute meaningfully to business outcomes, and demonstrate higher levels of productivity. Nonetheless, Lebanese SMEs continue to face considerable challenges in sustaining engagement amid ongoing economic and operational pressures, and the concept of employee engagement itself is often inconsistently understood or applied in practice.

This study is significant as it investigates the interplay between employee engagement, intention to leave, and normative commitment within a Lebanese SME context—a setting that remains largely unexplored in existing literature. While Western research has provided insights into these relationships, the Middle Eastern context, and Lebanon in particular, remains under-researched. Furthermore, to the author's knowledge, no prior studies have examined normative commitment as a moderating factor in this specific context, making the investigation both timely and necessary.

The primary objective of this research is to examine the relationship between employee engagement and intention to leave and to explore whether normative commitment influences the strength or direction of this association. The study tests the hypothesis that normative commitment moderates the negative relationship between engagement and turnover intention, thereby providing empirical evidence to inform both theory and managerial practice in SMEs operating under challenging economic conditions.

To achieve these objectives, the study employed a structured survey instrument composed of validated scales. The questionnaire collected demographic data, including employees' age, gender, education level, employment type, customer interaction frequency, industry, and organizational tenure. Measures of employee engagement, normative commitment, and intention to leave were included using Likert-type scales, enabling the collection of quantitative data for empirical analysis of the proposed model.

Measures

Employee engagement

Employee engagement was assessed using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (every day). The study employed the 9-item short version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli *et al.* (2006), which evaluates three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Sample items include statements such as, "At my work, I feel bursting with energy," "I get carried away when I am working," and "I am proud of the work that I do." The internal consistency of the scale, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.892, suggesting good reliability.

Normative commitment

To measure employees' sense of normative commitment, the six-item scale proposed by Meyer *et al.* (1993) was utilized. Respondents rated items such as "I feel it is morally correct to dedicate myself to this organization" and "This organization has a mission that I believe in and am committed to" on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.834.

Intention to leave

The intention to leave was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Farh *et al.* [48] and applied by Jehanzeb *et al.* [49]. A representative item includes, "I often think of quitting my present job." Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.798, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Sampling and procedure

Prior to the survey administration, employees were informed of the study's objectives by both their managers and the researcher. Verbal consent was obtained from participants due to bureaucratic and administrative restrictions on written consent in the workplace. Respondents indicated that verbal consent allowed them to provide more candid and comfortable responses. The study was ethically approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the Arab Open University-Lebanon, which sanctioned verbal consent. Participation was entirely voluntary, with anonymity and confidentiality assured, and participants were free to skip any question without consequence. A cover letter accompanied each questionnaire, reiterating these ethical considerations.

Before distributing the final survey, a pilot test was conducted with four SMEs and two academic researchers. Twenty responses were collected via printed questionnaires to identify unclear items. Minor clarifications were added in parentheses next to ambiguous terms, but the overall wording of the scale items remained unchanged. The questionnaire was then revised for clarity and typographical accuracy.

The study targeted employees working in Lebanese SMEs across multiple industries. SMEs in Lebanon are defined, following World Bank criteria, as firms with fewer than 100 full-time employees. According to the ERF Report, Lebanon has 222,436 SMEs, which account for 95% of all registered businesses and employ approximately 1,230,000 individuals, highlighting the sector's significance. Target SMEs were identified using business directories, including the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Order of Hospital and Healthcare Institutions, and the Association of Caterers and Hospitality Service Providers. After initial phone contact, a shortlist of potential participants was created, from which SMEs were randomly selected. All sectors across five government localities were included, except telecommunications, where all three national firms were selected. Of the 2,224 SMEs contacted—representing roughly 1% of all firms—56 agreed to participate.

Within each participating SME, surveys were distributed randomly to employees to ensure representativeness. Managers assisted in delivering the questionnaires while reiterating data confidentiality and academic purpose. Data collection took place between February 2023 and April 2024. Each survey included a cover letter outlining the study's objectives, scope, and confidentiality measures, and all responses were collected anonymously, resulting in a substantial dataset for analysis.

Table 1. Sampling details.

Business sector	No. of firms sampled	No. of usable responses received
Retail	6	101
F&B	4	82
Banking	5	53
Education	3	50
Hospitality	3	31
Health	4	27
Fashion	3	22
Consultancy	3	17
IT	3	17
Home furnishings	5	11
Leisure	5	5
NGOs	2	2
Other	10	101
Total	56	519

A total of 1,128 questionnaires were distributed across the 56 participating SMEs, from which 593 responses were returned, resulting in an overall response rate of 52.57%. After screening for incomplete, inconsistent, or insufficiently filled questionnaires, 74 responses were excluded, leaving 519 valid responses for analysis. Among these respondents, 245 were

female (47.21%), 392 were employed full-time (75.53%), 246 held a bachelor's degree (47.40%), and 81 had a master's degree (15.61%). **Table 2** presents the demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, age, education level, employment status, frontline status (i.e., whether the role involves frequent interaction with customers), and average organizational tenure, which was 50.79 months.

Table 2. Demographic data of the respondents

No	Respondent data	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender		
	Male	274	52.79
	Female	245	47.21
	Total	519	100
2	Age		
	18-20	74	14.25
	21-30	348	67.11
	31-40	69	13.28
	41-50	20	3.84
	Over 50	8	1.52
	Total	519	100
3	Education		
	High school	160	30.83
	Bachelor	246	47.40
	Masters	81	15.61
	Doctorate	20	3.85
	Professional certificate	8	1.54
	Vocational	4	0.77
	Total	519	100
4	Job status		
	Full-time	392	75.53
	Part-time	111	21.39
	Contractual	16	3.08
	Total	519	100
5	Front line		
	Yes	450	86.71
	No	69	13.29
	Total	519	100

Results and Discussion

The data analysis was conducted using SPSS, which included assessments of scale reliability and validity. Moderation analysis was performed using PROCESS v3.4, as proposed by Hayes [50].

Descriptive analysis

Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. Several notable relationships were observed. Employee engagement and normative commitment exhibited a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation ($r = .608$, $p < .01$). In contrast, the relationship between employee engagement and intention to leave was weak, negative, and statistically significant ($r = -.199$, $p < .01$). Similarly, normative commitment demonstrated a weak, negative, yet statistically significant correlation with intention to leave ($r = -.184$, $p < .01$).

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables.

Variables	Means (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	1	2	3
(1) Employee Engagement (EE)	4.83	1.29	(.892)		
(2) Normative Commitment (NC)	3.30	.92	.608**	(.834)	
(3) Intention to Leave (ITL)	2.92	.76	-.199**	-.184**	(.798)

N = 519, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Cronbach's alphas appear across the diagonal in parentheses.

Scale validation

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy for all scales ranged from 0.768 to 0.908, indicating the suitability of the data for factor analysis (**Table 4**). Cronbach's alpha values for the scales ranged between 0.798 and 0.892,

exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 [51], which confirms internal consistency. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($p = .000$), supporting the factorability of the correlation matrices. The eigenvalues and cumulative variance explained were as follows: employee engagement, 4.911 (54.568% cumulative); normative commitment, 3.337 (55.615% cumulative); and intention to leave, 2.505 (62.619% cumulative). All values were acceptable at $p < .05$, allowing rejection of the null hypothesis. Construct, content, and criterion validity were assessed during scale development and data collection procedures, confirming that the measures were valid and reliable.

Table 4. Scale testing results

Test \ Variable	Engagement (EE)	Normative commitment (NC)	Intention to leave (ITL)
KMO	.908	.844	.768
Approx Chi Square	2259.908	1130.936	653.415
Df	36	15	6
Sig.	.000	.000	.000
N (Scale items)	9	6	4

Hypothesis testing

To examine the proposed hypothesis regarding the moderating role of normative commitment (NC) on the relationship between employee engagement (EE) and intention to leave (ITL), a moderation analysis was conducted using PROCESS v3.4 [50]. Predictor variables were mean-centered to reduce multicollinearity between interaction terms and their components [52]. Multicollinearity was assessed using the variance inflation factor (VIF), with all values below the recommended threshold of 5 (EE and NC VIF = 1.586), indicating no critical collinearity issues [53].

The overall model was statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.0539$, $p < .001$). The direct effect of EE on ITL was significant ($\beta = -0.0882$, 95% CI [-0.1510, -0.0254], $p < .05$), whereas the direct effect of NC on ITL was not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.0801$, 95% CI [-0.1682, 0.0079], $p > .05$) (**Table 5**). The interaction term representing the moderation effect of NC on the EE-ITL relationship (path c3) was significant ($\beta = -0.0509$, 95% CI [-0.0989, -0.0029], $p < .05$), with a significant R^2 -change ($\beta = 0.0080$, $p < .05$), indicating that NC negatively moderates the relationship between EE and ITL.

The conditional effects were further examined using the Johnson-Neyman technique [54], which identifies regions of significance for the moderator. The analysis revealed that the moderating effect is significant at NC values above -0.4642. Specifically, when NC is high (0.9156), EE has a stronger negative impact on ITL (effect = -0.1348, 95% CI [-0.2150, -0.0547], $p < .05$), while at the mean level of NC (0.0000), the effect remains significant (effect = -0.0882, 95% CI [-0.1510, -0.0254], $p < .05$). In contrast, at low levels of NC (-0.9156), the effect of EE on ITL is not significant (effect = -0.0415, 95% CI [-0.1146, 0.0315], $p > .05$) (**Table 6**). These results provide empirical support for the hypothesis that normative commitment moderates the relationship between employee engagement and intention to leave.

Table 5. Results of overall model and interaction term

	β	p	LLCI	ULCI
Employee engagement (EE)	-.0882	.0060	-.1510	-.0254
Normative commitment (NC)	-.0801	.0744	-.1682	.0079
EE x NC	-.0509	.0376	-.0989	-.0029
R^2 -change in EE x NC	.0080	.0376		
Model R^2	.0539	.0000		

$p \leq .05$.

Table 6. Conditional effects of ENG at different levels of the moderator normative commitment.

Moderator	Effect	p	LLCI	ULCI
-.9156	-.0415	.2642	-.1146	.0315
.0000	-.0882	.0060	-.1510	-.0254
.9156	-.1348	.0010	-.2150	-.0547

$p \leq .05$.

Table 7. Moderator value(s) defining Johnson-Neyman significance region(s).

Value	% below	% above
-.4642	26.2042	73.7958

In **Figure 2**, the conditional effects of employee engagement (EE) on intention to leave (ITL) were illustrated across different levels of normative commitment (NC), specifically one standard deviation below the mean, at the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean. The 95% confidence interval (CI) for low NC included zero, indicating that the effect of EE on ITL was not significant under conditions of lower NC (-0.9156). In contrast, the 95% CI for high NC excluded zero, showing a significant effect at higher NC levels (0.9156). These findings suggest that normative commitment amplifies the negative association between employee engagement and intention to leave.

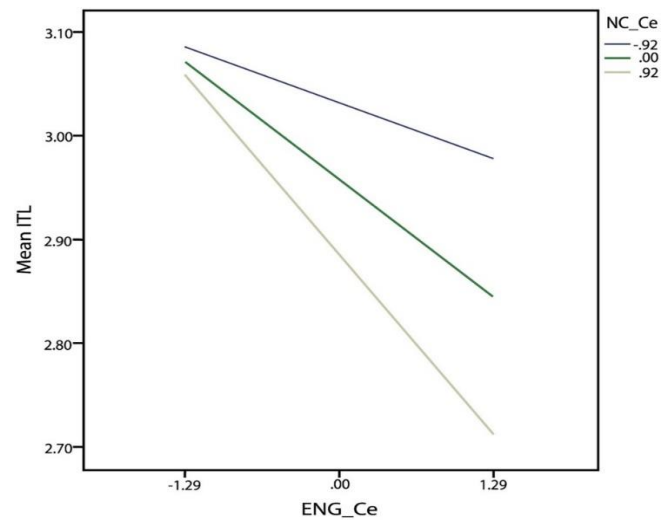


Figure 2. Johnson–Neyman regions of significance for the conditional effects of engagement at different values of NC.

This study aimed to empirically examine the influence of employee engagement (EE) on intention to leave (ITL), with a focus on the moderating role of normative commitment (NC). The results confirmed that EE has a significant negative effect on ITL, consistent with prior research (e.g., Bailey *et al.* [18]; Jyoti & Dimple [6]; Memon *et al.* [30]; Saks [26]; Wang & Chen, [55]). Employees who exhibit higher levels of engagement tend to experience more fulfilling and rewarding work, leading to lower intentions to leave. Engaged employees display greater vigor, absorption, and dedication, fostering loyalty to their organization and reducing the likelihood of ITL [19, 26]. According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, positive work experiences associated with EE enhance employees' commitment and loyalty, particularly normative commitment. At low EE levels, the study found that NC only slightly reduces ITL, indicating that engagement has a dominant role in influencing employees' intentions to leave. As EE increases, ITL decreases more substantially for employees with medium NC levels, while those with high NC experience a marked decline in ITL, confirming the moderating effect of NC. These findings provide empirical evidence for the regulatory role of NC on the EE–ITL relationship within the underexplored Lebanese SME context, thereby contributing to the broader literature on employee turnover.

Theoretical implications

This research extends the understanding of EE, NC, and ITL within management and organizational behavior literature. It provides empirical support for the moderating role of NC, especially within the post-COVID-19 context in Lebanon, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. The study also reinforces the relevance of the JD-R framework, demonstrating how NC can shape the relationship between EE and ITL. Overall, the findings contribute to theory by offering new insights into the psychological and behavioral mechanisms that influence employees' intentions to leave.

Practical implications

The study offers actionable insights for managers and organizations, particularly SMEs in Lebanon, facing high turnover rates. Employees who perceive that they are valued and supported exhibit stronger loyalty and are less likely to leave, which reduces recruitment and training costs associated with turnover. Managers should prioritize fostering both EE and NC to curb ITL. Recommended strategies include promoting work–life balance, enhancing well-being, providing leadership development, encouraging skill growth, and embedding empathy and support into HR practices. Post-pandemic challenges make it crucial to create an organizational environment that sustains engagement and commitment. The study highlights that high NC amplifies the effect of EE in reducing ITL, indicating that managers must also recognize and address employees' moral and psychological needs while rewarding contributions effectively.

Limitations and future research directions

Several limitations should be considered. First, the study used a cross-sectional design, which restricts causal inferences. Longitudinal studies are recommended to examine how EE, NC, and ITL interact over time. Second, the research was conducted exclusively in Lebanon; future studies could expand to other Middle Eastern countries or different cultural settings to enhance generalizability. Third, while the study focused on three variables, further research could explore additional factors influencing ITL, such as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), burnout, stress, job satisfaction, perceived supervisory support (PSS), and well-being. Lastly, while NC was tested as a moderator, future research could examine alternative

moderators to deepen understanding of the EE–ITL relationship and identify additional mechanisms to manage employee turnover.

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