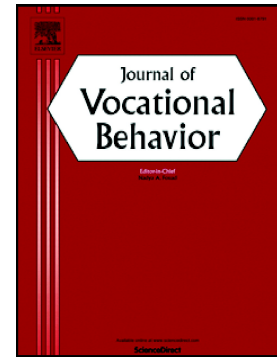


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Career Construction in Social Exchange:**A Dual-Path Model Linking Career Adaptability to Turnover Intention**

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Abstract

Although the negative relationship between career adaptability and turnover intention has been established in previous research, understanding of the mechanisms and boundary conditions is still incomplete. In this study we attempt to address this gap by developing a dual-path moderated mediation model based on career construction theory, social exchange theory and trait activation theory. Specifically, we propose two mediators - career satisfaction and perceived organizational support (POS) - to explain the negative effect of career adaptability on turnover intention. Moreover, following the trait activation perspective, we propose that organizational brands, including symbolic and instrumental brands, could separately moderate these two mediation paths. We collected multi-source data among a sample of 1013 employees and 200 HRs from 200 organizations in China to test these ideas. The results show that both career satisfaction and POS mediate the negative effect of career adaptability on turnover intention. Moreover, the mediation path through career satisfaction to turnover intention is stronger in companies with more favorable symbolic brands, and the mediation path through POS to turnover intention is stronger in companies with more favorable instrumental brands. The findings have important implications for both career construction research and organizational career management practices.

Keywords: career adaptability; turnover; career construction theory; social exchange theory

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Career Construction in Social Exchange:

A Dual-Path Model Linking Career Adaptability to Turnover Intention

Fast-changing work environments and employment patterns require individuals to actively adapt to the emerging challenges and difficulties in their career development (Arthur, 1994; Hall, Yip, & Doiron, 2018; Savickas et al., 2009). Career adaptability refers to the psychosocial resources that enable individuals to overcome challenges in their career development (Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). According to Savickas (1997), career adaptability consists of four dimensions: becoming *concerned* about one's vocational future (career concern); taking *control* over one's vocational activities (career control); expressing *curiosity* to explore possible selves and future work scenarios (career curiosity); and acquiring *confidence* in pursuing vocational aspirations and implement career choices (career confidence). Career adaptability has been found to be an important predictor for positive career outcomes, such as salary, promotability and career satisfaction (Johnston, 2018; Rudolph, Lavigne, & Zacher, 2017).

As the career world is becoming more and more boundaryless, employees are having more and more opportunities to move across organizations to achieve their career goals (Arthur, 1994); nevertheless, the associated risks also require individuals to learn effective ways of managing the inter-organization mobility process (Guan, Arthur, Khapova, Hall, & Lord, 2019). As individuals with a higher level of career adaptability are more capable of achieving adaptive responses and making adaptive decisions in their career transitions (Johnston, 2018; Rudolph et al., 2017; Savickas, 1997), it is crucial to understand the

mechanisms underpinning the effect of career adaptability on employees' intention to leave, in order to offer meaningful guidance about career self-management in a boundaryless career world (Guan et al., 2019). In addition, as career adaptability also serves as an important predictor of employees' work performance (e.g., Ohme & Zacher, 2015) and proactive work behaviors (e.g., Douglass & Duffy, 2015; Duffy, Douglass, & Autin, 2015), this line of research helps organizations to identify effective ways to retain their talents.

From a career construction perspective (Savickas, 2002, 2005, 2013), career adaptability enables employees to identify and construct positive meanings from their work, which in turn reduce their intention to leave. Consistently, career adaptability has been found to be negatively associated with employee turnover intention (Chan & Mai, 2015; Chan, Mai, Kuok, & Kong, 2016; Guan, Zhou, Ye, Jiang, & Zhou, 2015b; Ito & Brotheridge, 2005; Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2011), with this relationship partially mediated by indicators of subjective career success, such as career satisfaction (Chan & Mai, 2015; Chan et al., 2016; Guan et al., 2015b). Despite the above progress, this career construction account does not offer a complete understanding of why there is a negative effect of career adaptability on turnover intention.

A neglected possibility in extant literature is that the effect of career adaptability on turnover intention can also be explained by the various forms of social exchange resources an employee obtains from the organization he/she works for (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell, & Allen, 2007). From the social exchange perspective (e.g., Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Foa & Foa, 1980), both

symbolic resources (resources conveying meanings beyond objective worth) and concrete resources (tangible resources related to instrumental needs) can be used for exchange between employees and organizations. In this study we propose that since career adaptability reflects the psychosocial capability that enables employees to secure valuable resources and achieve adaptive outcomes (Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), it should help employees to obtain both symbolic and instrumental resources from their organizations. It follows that the negative relationship between career adaptability and turnover intention is not only explained by perceived symbolic meanings (e.g., career satisfaction), but also the instrumental support obtained from the organization, i.e. perceived organizational support. Thus, the first aim of the current study is to examine whether perceived organizational support (POS), which reflects the amount of instrumental resources received from an organization (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001), can serve as a unique mediator for the relationship between career adaptability and turnover intention over and above the mediating effect of career satisfaction.

To further corroborate the co-existence of symbolic meanings and instrumental benefits in accounting for the effect of career adaptability on turnover intention, we draw upon trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003) and incorporate organizational brands (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) as important boundary conditions for these mediation effects. Lievens and Highhouse (2003) differentiate symbolic brands, which describe the human-like characteristics (e.g., sincerity, innovativeness) associated with organizations, from

instrumental brands, which describe the tangible benefits (e.g., salary) individuals receive from the organization. From a trait activation perspective (Tett & Burnett, 2003), we propose that career adaptability's effect on turnover intention through career satisfaction is stronger when organizations supply relevant cues for an employee to construct symbolic meanings (symbolic brands); similarly, the effect through perceived organizational support is stronger when organizations supply relevant cues and opportunities for an employee to secure instrumental resources (instrumental brands).

In short, in the current study, we propose a dual-path moderated mediation model (see Figure 1) to examine the mechanisms underpinning the relationship between career adaptability and turnover intention. By doing this, we respond to the call to expand our understandings of the effect of career adaptability through other theoretical perspectives than merely career construction theory (Johnston, 2018). In addition, as found in the meta-analysis by Rudolph et al. (2017), the 95% credibility interval of the correlation between career adaptability and turnover intention is $[-.49, -.11]$ and only 13.13% of the observed variances in the correlation could be attributed to the sampling error, both suggesting that there are important moderators for this relationship (Geyskens, Krishnan, Steenkamp, & Cunha, 2009; Koslowsky & Sagie, 1993). By examining the moderation roles of employer brands, we not only provide further evidence for the career construction and social exchange mechanisms, but also contribute important findings on the contingency factors that shape the effects of career adaptability (Savickas, 2002; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Insert Figure 1 here

The Mediating Role of Career Satisfaction

Career construction theory (Savickas, 2002, 2005, 2013) focuses on individuals' subjective construction of their vocational experiences, seeing vocational development as a self-making process. As this theory argues, by adapting the self to vocational tasks, transitions, and traumas, individuals construct personal meaning from their careers. Career adaptability captures one's psychosocial resources to make successful adaption, and thus determines the quality of subjective construction (Savickas, 1997). With high career adaptability, individuals are likely to obtain favorable material for subjective construction and experience positive vocational meaning, and so be highly satisfied with their careers.

Specifically, with high career adaptability, individuals are able to anticipate, prepare for, and deal with vocational challenges, difficulties, and obstacles through making effective adaptive responses, such as envisioning future goals (Guan et al., 2017), exploring possible options (Guan et al., 2015a), planning for anticipated opportunities and challenges (Hirschi, Herrmann, & Keller, 2015), and maintaining high career decision-making self-efficacy (Zhou, Guan, Xin, Mak, & Deng, 2016). As a result, they could gain favorable vocational experiences, such as having a sense of challenge (Jiang, 2016), high calling (Guo et al., 2014), high work engagement (Xie, Xia, Xin, & Zhou, 2016), and a feeling of meaningfulness (Buyukgoze-Kavas, Duffy, & Douglass, 2015), which help them construct positive meanings that contribute to their career satisfaction (Savickas, 2002). High career

satisfaction, in turn, indicates a favorable state that prevents employees from voluntarily leaving the organization (Guan et al., 2015b; Maertz & Griffeth, 2004).

In contrast, individuals with low career adaptability might experience problems in their construction of positive career meanings because they lack the competences to effectively adapt to challenges and difficulties in their careers. As a result, they would have a low level of career satisfaction, which may motivate them to leave the organization as a way to search for their career meanings in other organizations. Consistently, existing studies have demonstrated the mediating role of career satisfaction in the relationship between career adaptability and turnover intention (Chan & Mai, 2015; Chan et al., 2016; Guan et al., 2015b). Accordingly, we propose that:

Hypothesis 1: Career satisfaction mediates the negative relationship between career adaptability and turnover intention.

The Mediating Role of POS

From the social exchange perspective (Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels, & Hall, 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), the relationship between employees and organizations consists of extensive exchange episodes, in which one party pays back what the other party has contributed. During these episodes, when the expectations of both parties are met, the quality of the relationships improves. The resources that organizations can supply for exchange can be symbolic (resources conveying meanings beyond objective worth) or concrete (tangible resources related to instrumental needs). Since career adaptability enables individuals to initiate interpersonal processes to improve their fit with the environment

(Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), career adaptability should help employees to obtain more instrumental resources, as reflected by high POS (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

Specifically, at work employers expect individuals to fulfill certain role responsibilities and requirements (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Career adaptability enables individuals to engage in high-quality career exploration (Hirschi et al., 2015; Li et al., 2015), which helps them get a job that fits their abilities and values (Guan et al., 2013). Due to the high level of fit, they are likely to achieve good performance in their jobs (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Besides, at work, career adaptability enables individuals to regulate towards the role expectations by setting challenging goals (Zacher, 2015), recognizing opportunities, and securing resources (Tolentino, Sedoglavich, Lu, Garcia, & Restubog, 2014). This process could improve individuals' in-role performance (Ohme & Zacher, 2015). More importantly, career adaptability motivates individuals to go beyond the prescribed responsibilities by making improvements (e.g., Douglass & Duffy, 2015; Duffy, Douglass, & Autin, 2015), such as by proactively engaging into skill development, networking, and environmental exploration (Nilforooshan & Salimi, 2016; Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015). These proactive behaviors could help individuals make contributions beyond their formal role expectations. In short, individuals with high career adaptability could fulfill their responsibilities and duties well. Reciprocally, employers are likely to trust these individuals, value their contributions, and care for their wellbeing, so that these individuals would experience high POS (Eisenberger et al., 2001). POS serves as a contractual factor encouraging individuals to stay in their current organizations (Maertz &

Griffeth, 2004).

By contrast, individuals with low career adaptability are likely to experience misfit with their jobs (Jiang, 2016) and feel stressful about their work (Maggiori, Johnston, Krings, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2013), which may lead to failure in responsibility and duty fulfillment due to the incapability of coping with the challenges and difficulties in work settings. As a result, they may receive fewer rewards, recognition, and support from the employers, thereby having low POS and high turnover intention. To test this mechanism, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2: POS mediates the negative relationship between career adaptability and turnover intention, after controlling for the mediation effect of career satisfaction.

The Moderating Roles of Organization Brands

To further corroborate the co-existence of symbolic meanings (via career satisfaction) and instrumental benefits (via POS) in accounting for the effect of career adaptability on turnover intention, we also examine the moderating roles of organizational brands (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) in this process. Noticeably, career construction theory emphasizes the interaction between individual and environmental factors in shaping vocational outcomes (Savickas, 2002, 2005, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). For example, Savickas and Porfeli (2012, p. 663) pointed out that environmental factors “provide different opportunities and imperatives to develop and express psychosocial resources and transactional competencies.” This view is in line with the trait activation perspective (Tett &

Burnett, 2003) that individuals' dispositions are expressed in a more salient way when there are relevant contextual cues. Following these arguments, we focus on the moderation effects of organizational brands (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003), including symbolic and instrumental brands, because they provide corresponding cues and opportunities for individuals to construct positive meanings and secure instrumental resources from the organizational settings, respectively.

Organizational brands refer to "the amalgamation of mental representations and associations regarding an organization as an employer" (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016, p. 411) and describe the benefits employees get from their organizations due to their membership (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Symbolic brands are the human-like characteristics associated with organizations. They have intangible values because employees are attracted to these characteristics to express and maintain positive selves. Sample characteristics are sincerity, innovativeness, and competence (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). For example, employees could maintain or express their images as being innovative when their organizations are closely associated with innovativeness.

While career adaptability helps individuals to construct meanings from their work, symbolic brands provide the resources for individuals to do so. When organizations are associated with positive human-like characteristics, individuals have more opportunities to associate themselves with those cues and then absorb these experiences to form new self-concepts (Savickas, 2013). Thus, organizations' positive symbolic brands could activate the use of career adaptability to improve the meaningfulness of vocational experiences. As a

result, individuals could construct more positive vocational meaning from organizations with positive symbolic brands. In contrast, when organizations are not associated with positive symbolic brands, employees will lack the cues and opportunities to construct such meaning from their work. As a result, the effect of career adaptability on career satisfaction, as well as the indirect effect from career adaptability to turnover intention through career satisfaction, will be weakened. In line with these arguments, we propose:

Hypothesis 3: Organizational symbolic brands strengthen the indirect effect of career adaptability on turnover intention through career satisfaction, such that when organizations have more favorable symbolic brands, the indirect effect becomes stronger.

Instrumental brands are the tangible benefits that have utilitarian value, revealing what employees (could/expect to) get from their employers in exchange for their inputs. Sample benefits are pay, advancement, and job security (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Instrumental brands provide the opportunities for individuals to obtain resources that are beneficial for their instrumental needs. When organizations are associated with positive instrumental brands, individuals would have a clear idea that their efforts will be appreciated and rewarded by those resources. As a result, employees would be more strongly motivated to utilize their adaptive capabilities to secure these resources. Under this condition, employees' career adaptability could be better translated into the support they receive from the organizations. In contrast, when organizations are not associated with favorable instrumental brands, the effect of career adaptability on POS would be

constrained due to organizations' lack of relevant resources. Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 4: Organizational instrumental brands strengthen the indirect effect of career adaptability on turnover intention through POS, such that when organizations have more favorable instrumental brands, the indirect effect becomes stronger.

Method

Procedure and Samples

Data were collected by contacting financial companies in China based on a systematic search of their contact information online. We chose to focus on financial companies to rule out the confounding effects of industrial factors on our research model and because most employees in this industry have access to the internet, which means that we could distribute the surveys online to ensure response rate and anonymity. The managers and employees of the companies were informed that we aimed to investigate the factors that influence employee turnover. After obtaining their consent, we asked the top managers to randomly provide at least five employee email addresses and one email address of an HR manager who was highly familiar with the organization's strategy and status. This sampling strategy was adopted to balance the minimum level of representativeness and organizations' willingness to participate (e.g., Takeuchi, Lepak, Wang, & Takeuchi, 2007). Employee participants were asked to complete the online survey on their career adaptability, career satisfaction, POS, turnover intention, and demographic information. The HR managers were asked to complete the online survey on organizational brands and other background

information. Participants were ensured that their data would only be used for research purpose and their personal information would not be disclosed.

Through the procedure, we obtained a sample of 1013 employees and 200 HRs from 200 organizations (average 5.06 employees per organization). Among the 1013 employees, 514 (51.1%) were men; 4.6% of them were under 25, 42.2% were between 26 and 31, 33.3% were between 32 and 36, 16.1% were between 37 and 45, and 6.5% were above 45. In terms of job level, 3.2% were senior managers, 22.5% were middle managers, 32.1% were supervisors, and 37.3% were frontline employees. Among the 200 organizations, 82 were banks, 68 were securities traders, and 50 were other companies.

Measures

All measures were translated from English into Chinese except for the originally Chinese measure of career adaptability. We adopted the standard back-translation method. That is, we first translated the original items into Chinese, and asked those fluent in both languages to back-translate the items into English. We compared any differences and made corresponding refinements.

Career adaptability. We used a short version of the Chinese career adaptability scale (Hou, Leung, Li, Li, & Xu, 2012; Maggiori, Rossier, & Savickas, 2017). Because we collected data before Maggiori et al. (2017) published their paper, we did not use their short scale but selected the 4 highest-loading items from each sub-dimension (i.e., concern, control, curiosity, and confidence). Our scale consists of 16 items and is largely similar to theirs. Participants were asked to rate how strong their abilities are from 1 (not strong) to 5

(strongest). Sample items are: “Preparing for the future” (concern), “Taking responsibility for my actions” (control), “Looking for opportunities to grow as a person” (curiosity), “Taking care to do things well” (confidence). In the current study, the Cronbach alpha was $\alpha = .89$.

Perceived organizational support (POS). We adopted the 6-item short version of the POS scale (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; cited by Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). Participants were asked to rate their agreement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item is “My organization cares about my opinions”. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha was $\alpha = .86$.

Career satisfaction. We selected 4 items from the scale developed by Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley (1990). Participants were asked to rate their agreement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In the current study, the Cronbach alpha was $\alpha = .78$.

Turnover intention. The 5-item scale developed by Farh, Tsui, Xin, and Cheng (1998) was used. Participants were asked to rate their agreement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item is “I often think of quitting my present job”. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha was $\alpha = .84$.

Organizational brands. We adopted the scale developed by Lievens and Highhouse (2003). We used 15 items to measure the instrumental brands, including pay, advancement, job security, benefits, task demands, and flexible working hours, and 18 items to measure the symbolic brands, including prestige, innovativeness, competence, robustness, and

sincerity. Participants were asked to rate how much they agree that the items are consistent with the organization's status from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In the current study, since we mainly focus on the influence of overall brands rather than specific ones, we aggregated the items into instrumental brands (15 items, $\alpha = .91$) and symbolic brands (18 items, $\alpha = .91$).

Control variables. At the individual level, since meta-analysis showed that age and gender have little effects on turnover intention, we did not control them (Griffeth et al., 2000). Because employees at higher levels would have a higher cost to leave (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001), we included job level (1 = senior manager, 2 = middle manager, 3 = frontline manager, 4 = normal employees) as a control variable. At the organization level, there is no strong reason to expect that the type and the level of the organization would influence our interested variables, thus we did not control them. In sum, only employee job level was included as a control variable.

Analytic Strategy

Because organizational brands are organization-level variables, we conducted multilevel structural equation modelling analyses (MSEM; Liu, Zhang, & Wang, 2012; Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010). Compared with the traditional random coefficient modeling method, MSEM could provide more accurate estimation by calculating all the effects within one analysis.

In detail, in the model we specified instrumental and symbolic brands as level-2 variables and career adaptability as a level-1 variable. Since we hypothesized instrumental

and symbolic brands as the moderators on the relationships between career adaptability and mediators, we modelled the associations among our variables as the first-stage moderated mediation model (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). We allowed POS and career satisfaction to be correlated, because theoretically they might have a significant relationship. To get appropriate moderation relationships, as Aguinis, Gottfredson, and Culpepper (2013) suggested, career adaptability was group mean centered and the brands were grand mean centered. Job level (the control variable) was only regressed on the outcome (turnover intention)¹. Its effect was set as fixed because we did not expect that the relationships between job level and turnover intention to vary among different organizations (e.g., Luksyte, Avery, & Yeo, 2015). Mplus 7 was used for the MSEM analyses.

Results

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

The correlations and descriptive statistics are showed in Table 1. As we expected, career adaptability was positively related to career satisfaction ($r = .33, p < .001$) and POS ($r = .36, p < .001$), and negatively related to turnover intention ($r = -.28, p < .001$). Job level was significantly positively related to turnover intention ($r = .15, p < .001$).

¹ The results keep similar when it was also regressed on other variables.

Insert Table 1 here

Mediation analysis

The results of the MSEM are shown in Figure 2. As we could see, after controlling for job level and career adaptability, career satisfaction ($\beta = -.19, p < .001$) and POS ($\beta = -.36, p < .001$) were still significantly related to turnover intention. According to Preacher and Hayes (2008), the next step is to calculate the indirect effects. Since the re-sampling methods based on bootstrapping could not be applied in multilevel models, to deal with the challenge of being not normally distributed, we utilized a Monte Carlo approach to compute the confidence intervals of the indirect effects (Preacher & Selig, 2010). The analyses showed that the mediation via career satisfaction was significant ($B = -.08, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.12, -.04]$). The mediation via POS was also significant ($B = -.16, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.23, -.11]$). Therefore, the mediation hypotheses, i.e., hypotheses 1 and 2, were supported.

Insert Table 2 here

Moderated Mediation Analysis

As Figure 2 shows, the moderation effect of symbolic brands on the relationship between career adaptability and career satisfaction was significant ($\beta = .15, p < .05$). We then carried out a simple slope analysis. Because this is cross-level moderation, we utilized the tool provided by Preacher, Curran, and Bauer (2006) for our calculation. The results (see

Figure 2) showed that when symbolic brands were rated more favorably (+1 SD), the effect was stronger ($\beta = .50$, 95% CI = [.36, .63]). When they were rated less favorably (-1 SD), the effect was weaker ($\beta = .29$, 95% CI = [.14, .45]). The difference was also statistically significant (difference = .21, 95% CI = [.03, .41]).

Insert Table 2 here

We also hypothesized that instrumental brands would moderate the relationship between career adaptability and POS. As Figure 2 shows, the moderation was significant ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$). We carried out a simple slope test as above and found that (see Figure 3) when instrumental brands were rated more favorably (+1 SD), the effect was stronger ($\beta = .55$, 95% CI = [.41, .70]). When symbolic brands were rated less favorably (-1 SD), the effect was weaker ($\beta = .35$, 95% CI = [.21, .49]). The difference was also statistically significant (difference = .20, 95% CI = [.02, .38]).

Insert Figure 3 here

To test whether indirect effects were moderated, we followed Edwards and Lambert (2007) to calculate the difference of indirect effects at high (+1 SD) versus low (-1 SD) values of the moderators. Results are shown in Table 2. We found that for the mediation path via career satisfaction, when the score of symbolic brands was higher (+1 SD), the

indirect effect was stronger ($B = -.10$, 95% CI = $[-.15, -.05]$). When the score of symbolic was lower (-1 SD), the indirect effect was weaker ($B = -.05$, 95% CI = $[-.10, -.02]$). The difference was significant (difference = $-.04$, 95% CI = $[-.09, -.01]$). For the mediation path through POS, when the score of instrumental brands was higher (+1 SD), the indirect effect was stronger ($B = -.20$, 95% CI = $[-.28, -.13]$). When the score of symbolic brands was lower (-1 SD), the indirect effect was weaker ($B = -.13$, 95% CI = $[-.19, -.06]$). The difference was significant (difference = $-.08$, 95% CI = $[-.16, -.01]$). Therefore, both moderated mediation hypotheses, i.e., hypotheses 3 and 4, were supported.

Insert Figure 4 here

Discussion

In this study we focused on the relationship between career adaptability and turnover intention and examined the underlying mechanisms by integrating multiple perspectives. We showed that career adaptability influenced turnover intention through career satisfaction and POS. Moreover, we examined the moderation effects of organizational brands and found that organizational symbolic brands enhanced the indirect effect through career satisfaction, and organizational instrumental brands enhanced the indirect effect through POS. These findings carry important implications for future research and career management practices.

Theoretical Implications

The first contribution of the current study is to adopt a social exchange perspective to understand the mechanisms underpinning career adaptability's negative effect on turnover intention. Previous studies (Chan & Mai, 2015; Chan et al., 2016; Guan et al., 2015b) mainly focused on how career adaptability enhances the subjective construction of career meaning, such that career adaptability leads to high career satisfaction and decreases the intention to leave. This agentic perspective relies on personal experiences but neglects the social exchange process in workplaces (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell, & Allen, 2007). Drawing upon social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), we showed that individuals with high career adaptability intend to stay in their organization not only because they experience more positive subjective meaning (career satisfaction), but also because they receive more support from organizations (POS). These findings respond to Johnston's (2018) call to adopt new theoretical perspectives to deepen our understanding of career adaptability and extend career construction theory.

Although we found significant effects of career adaptability on the two mediators (career satisfaction and POS), more research is needed to empirically test the mechanisms underlying these effects. For example, we argue that career adaptability's positive effect on career satisfaction is due to the subjective construction of symbolic meaning from work, and its influence on POS is due to in-role responsibility fulfillment and extra-role proactivity. Although these arguments are consistent with career construction theory and extant empirical evidence, they were not tested in the current paper. Nevertheless, the findings of

this study pave the way for more future research on these mediating mechanisms, which will further advance our understanding of the effects of career adaptability in organization settings. In this study we only used turnover intention as the outcome variable, but the two mechanisms might also lead to other important outcomes. For example, career satisfaction and POS may both contribute to higher psychological wellbeing and lower counter-productive behaviors. In future research, it would be interesting to test the influence of subjective construction and social exchange processes in regard to other outcomes. More importantly, scholars could examine whether these two mechanisms play different roles in influencing different outcomes.

Although this study provides evidence for the mediation model from career adaptability to turnover intention through career satisfaction and POS, the cross-sectional design could not confirm the causal relations among the variables. From a conservation of resource theory (COR; Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018), it is also possible that POS serves as an important contextual resource that improves employees' psychosocial resources such as career adaptability (e.g., Ocampo, Restubog, Liwag, Wang, & Petelczyc, 2018). It follows that the relations among these variables might be reciprocal. That is, on the one hand individuals utilize support from organizations to develop their capabilities to adapt to vocational challenges and difficulties; on the other hand, such capabilities enable them to fulfill the role responsibilities set by the organizations, which motivates the organizations to reciprocate by valuing these individuals' contributions and caring for their wellbeing. Future research should pay attention to the reciprocal effects of these constructs and examine their

dynamics across time.

Another important future direction is to examine the various levels of social exchange in organizational settings. In addition to person-organization exchange, there are also person-group exchange and person-person exchange in organizational settings (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007; Grant & Parker, 2009). Since the quality of teamwork and relational bonds have been shown to be important factors that determine individuals' decision to leave or stay (e.g., Lee, Burch, & Mitchell, 2014), it is important to consider how career adaptability affects social exchange at organization, team and interpersonal levels, and how the exchange quality at these levels collectively influences employees' turnover intention. Besides the social exchange perspective, the effects of career adaptability on turnover intention can also be explained by conservation of resource theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), given that career adaptability serves as a very important psychosocial resource for employees' self-regulation at work. In the future, scholars could integrate these theoretical lenses to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of career adaptability on turnover intention and other important outcomes.

In addition to the mediation roles of career satisfaction and POS, the second contribution of this study is the examination of the boundary conditions for the above dual-path model. Although career construction theory (Savickas, 2002, 2005) posits that that career development outcomes result from the interaction between inner psychosocial resources (e.g., career adaptability) and outer worlds (e.g., family, organizations, societies), not much work has been done to examine these interaction effects. Neglecting the

contextual factors not only limits our understanding of the person-situation dynamics, but also puts us at the risk of having a biased understanding of the effects of career adaptability. To fill this gap, we adopt a trait activation perspective (Tett & Burnett, 2003) and propose that employer brands can direct the expression of career adaptability through providing relevant cues and opportunities.

The significant moderation effect of symbolic brands on the path through career satisfaction gives further support to the argument that career development is a self-construction process (Savickas, 2013): individuals construct the positive human-like characteristics of their organizations into their vocational experiences, which increases their intention to stay in the organization. Similarly, the significant moderation effect of instrumental brands on the path through POS gives further support to the roles of instrumental resources in helping organizations to retain employees with higher career adaptability. Taken together, these significant moderation effects respond to the call by Rudolph et al. (2017) to examine potential contingencies on the effect of career adaptability on turnover intention. In addition to organizational brands, there are other cues and resources that may offer opportunities for employees to express their career adaptability, such as leaderships that epitomize the visions and images of an organization. These cues and resources might also serve as important moderators, which could be examined in future research.

The current research focuses more on the factors inside organizations. Scholars could consider external factors in future research. As the career world is becoming more and

more boundaryless (Guan et al., 2019), employees with high career adaptability also have more opportunities in the external labor market. As a result, these employees may be motivated to take external strategies to achieve career success, especially when their current employer brands are not strong. The findings of our study show that when there are favorable organizational brands, employees with higher career adaptability are more likely to spend effort constructing meanings and achieving instrumental support, which would reduce their intention to leave. However, the results also show that under unfavorable organizational brands, the effects of career adaptability on these variables are weakened. Given that employees with high career adaptability can always identify and secure good employment opportunities from the external market, it would be interesting to examine what kind of external strategies will be used, and how they will influence employees' turnover intention. Therefore, future research should consider both the internal and external labor markets to better understand the mechanisms underpinning the adaptability-turnover intention relationship.

The current study also contributes to the organizational brands model by extending it to the career development literature. Borrowing ideas from marketing research, Lievens and Highhouse (2003) developed the concept of instrumental and symbolic brands, describing organizations' tangible and intangible attributes. The following studies mainly focused on how these brands help attract potential employees and bring organizational benefits, but seldom examined how these brands influence existing employees (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). This is an important gap because employees are also "customers" of the

organizations. As we showed in the current study, symbolic and instrumental brands could help keep the employees – that is, employees might stay because they buy into these brands. Specifically, symbolic brands strengthen the subjective construction effect on the relationship between career adaptability and turnover intention, and instrumental brands strengthen the social exchange effect on the relationship. Note that voluntary turnover has an important detrimental effect on organizational performance (Park & Shaw, 2013), thus this study also responds to Lievens and Slaughter's (2016) call to examine whether “attractive workplace image pay[s] off in better organizational performance” (p. 432).

Practical Implications

This paper has several important implications for career counseling practices and organization management practices. From a career development perspective, findings of this study suggest that employees with higher career adaptability are more capable of constructing symbolic meaning and obtaining instrumental resources within organizational environments, thereby having a stronger intention to stay. Due to the important role of career adaptability in these processes, career educators and counselors can use career adaptability as an important diagnosis tool. Interventions that aim to improve these abilities should have important implications for employees. Savickas (2005) proposed that career adaptability could be trained through practicing related skills, such as through engaging in planning, decision-making, exploration and problem solving. Koen, Klehe and Van Vianen (2012) have shown an example of how to design interventions based on the theory, and these practices may also be applicable to employees as way to guide them to take practical

actions to improve their adaptive capability. In addition, the moderating roles of symbolic and instrumental brands suggest that to maximize the beneficial effects of career adaptability, it is important to join an organization that epitomizes these important attributes. Career educators and counselors should attempt to guide individuals and job seekers to effectively search and evaluate information related to employer brands. Specifically, Lievens and Slaughter (2016) argued that employer brands are influenced by four factors: organizational actions and characteristics (e.g., investment in human capital and CSR policies), organizational information (e.g., job advertisements), other information from word of mouth (e.g., from social media) and recruiters (e.g., interviewers). Based on this framework, career educators and counselors can guide individuals to better evaluate targeted organizations' symbolic and instrumental brands by collecting relevant information from organizations' homepages, social media and the current employees in the organizations. In addition, individuals can also be guided to collect information from recruiters, by observing the extent to which they epitomize the employer brands in their attitudes and behaviors. From a management perspective, due to the important role of career adaptability in employee performance and turnover intention, organizations may consider using career adaptability as a selection criterion in recruitment to identify high-potential candidates. In addition, training and job rotation programs can also be used as an effective way to improve employees' career adaptability (Guan, Yang, Zhou, Tian, & Eves, 2016; Guan et al., 2015b). To retain existing talent, practices such as orientation and training programs, and presentation of organizational information in ads and public media, can be used to promote

organizational brands (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Managers should also convey strong information on the symbolic and instrumental brands associated with the current organization in their daily communications with employees, as a way to cue employees that they have extensive opportunities to express their capabilities inside the organization.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Despite the implications, this study has several limitations. First, as mentioned above, we adopted a cross-sectional design and could not determine the causal effects. To examine dynamic relationships of these constructs, longitudinal research that tracks their relationship and interactions over time could tease apart potential reciprocal or lagged relationships (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). Second, in this study we collected data about employer brands from the HR managers of these companies because HR managers generally have a deep understanding of their employer brands, given that many of the HRM functions (e.g., recruitment, training) are closely related to an accurate understanding of organizational brands. This also allowed us to operationalize brands as a feature of the company environment, rather than as a perception by employees. However, it could be argued that the perception of brands by HR managers may be different from employees. Future research should continue to examine how employer brands are understood among HR managers, line managers and employees, to achieve a more in-depth understanding of the unpinning mechanisms. Third, we chose an industry where turnover is quite pervasive, which means that compared to the total population our sampling might be biased. However, the descriptive statistics of turnover intention in the current study are comparable with other

studies (e.g., Chan et al., 2016; Chan & Mai, 2015). In the future, scholars should use a more representative sample to replicate our findings.

In spite of the above limitations, in this paper we show a dual-path model that finds that employees with high career adaptability are less likely to leave because they are satisfied with their careers and perceive support from the organizations. In addition, the organizations' positive symbolic and instrumental brands further strengthen these respective effects. Future research should continue to examine this important question by integrating multiple theoretical perspectives, adopting more rigorous designs and using more representative samples.

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Table 1. Simple Correlation and Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender ^a	2.72	.92	/						
2. Age ^b	.51	.50	-.06	/					
3. Job level ^c	3.09	.87	.11**	-.38***	/				
4. Career Adaptability	3.95	.55	-.04	-.03	-.10**	.89			
5. Perceived Organizational Support	3.26	.75	-.05	.002	-.09*	.36***	.86		
6. Career Satisfaction	3.25	.86	-.05	.01	-.11**	.33***	.49***	.78	
7. Turnover Intention	2.46	.84	.08*	-.05	.15***	-.28***	-.53***	-.45***	.84
1. Instrumental Brands	3.56	.65	.91						
2. Symbolic Brands	3.74	.75	.66**	.91					

Note: N (level 1) = 1013; N (level 2) = 50. Cronbach alpha is showed on the diagonal.

a: 1 = male, 0 = female; b: 1 = under 25, 2 = between 26 and 31, 3 = between 32 and 36, 4 = between 37 and 45, 5 = above 45; c: 1 = senior manager, 2 = middle manager, 3 = supervisor, 4 = frontline employee

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Indirect Effects of Career Adaptability on Turnover Intention

	Effect	95% CI
Mediator: Career Satisfaction		
Average indirect effect	-.08	[-.12, -.04]
High symbolic brands (+1SD)	-.10	[-.15, -.05]
Low symbolic brands (-1SD)	-.05	[-.10, -.02]
Difference between high and low	-.04	[-.09, -.01]
----- Mediator: POS		
Average indirect effect	-.16	[-.23, -.11]
High instrumental brands (+1SD)	-.20	[-.28, -.13]
Low instrumental brands (-1SD)	-.13	[-.19, -.06]
Difference between high and low	-.08	[-.16, -.01]

Note: POS = perceived organizational support

Figure 1. Research Model of the Current Paper

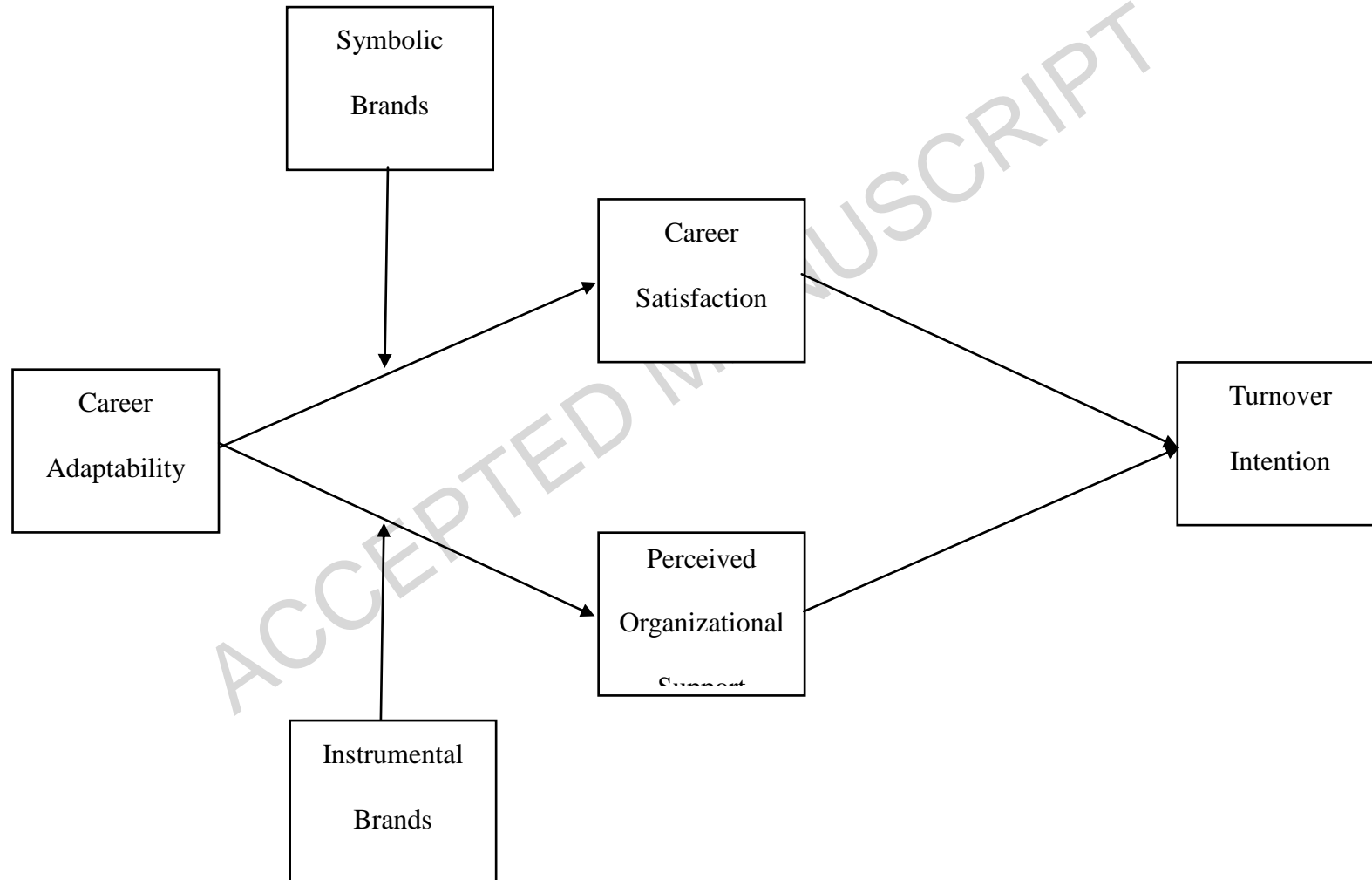
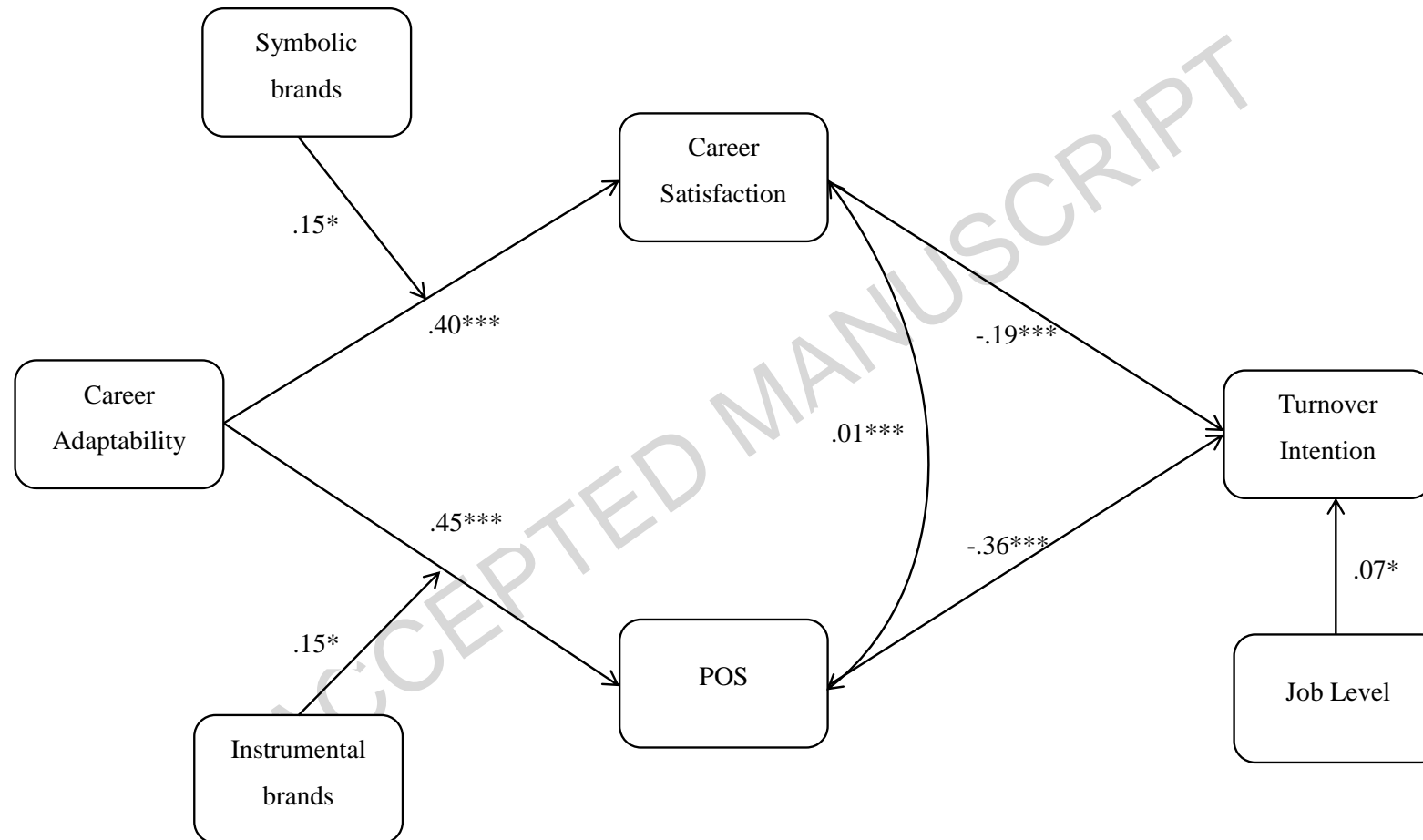
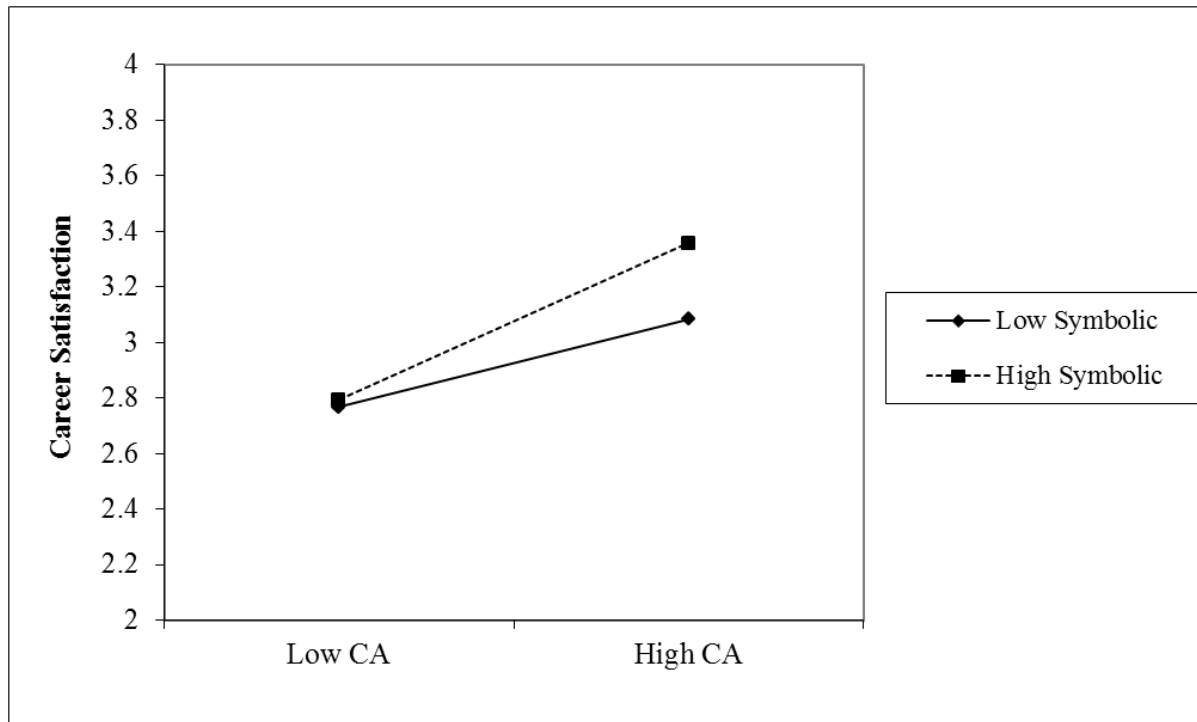


Figure 2. Results of Multilevel Structural Equation Modelling²

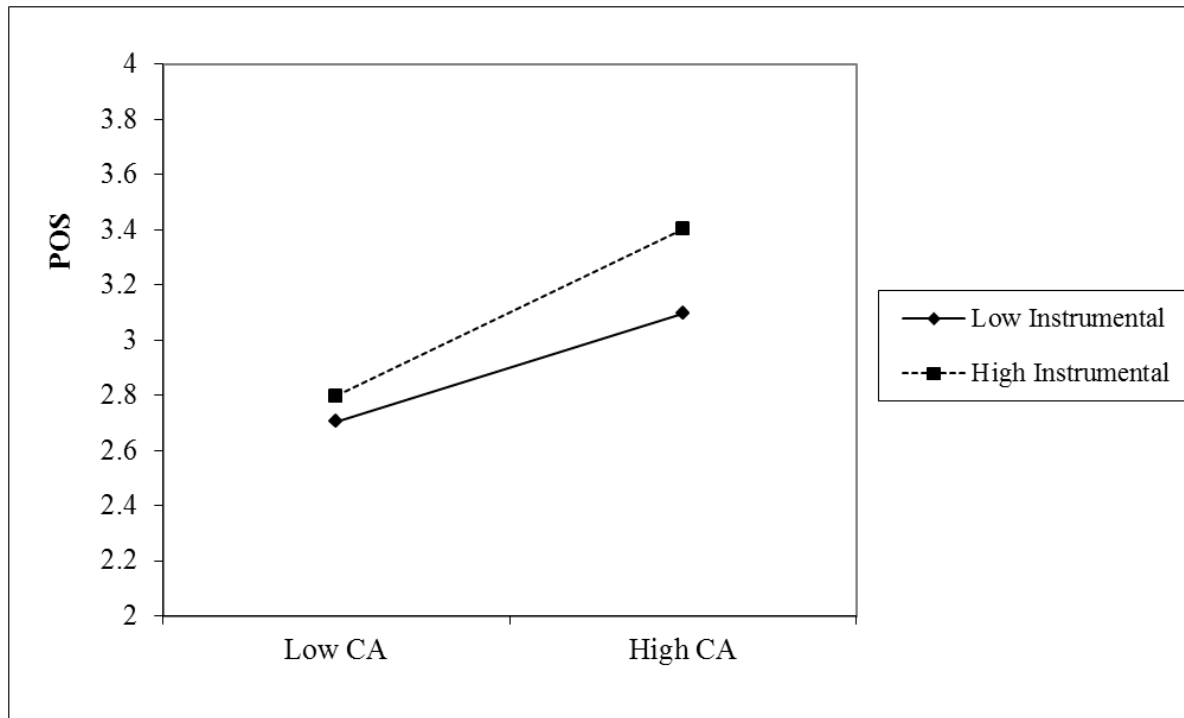
² Results keep largely similar when job level is linked to antecedents and mediators and when gender, age, organizational level and type are included as control variables.

Figure 3. The Interaction Effect Between Career Adaptability and Symbolic Brands



Note: CA = career adaptability.

Figure 4. The Interaction Effect between Career Adaptability and Instrumental Brands



Note: CA = career adaptability. POS = perceived organizational support.

Highlights

- Career adaptability is negatively associated to turnover intention
- In addition to career satisfaction, perceived organizational support also mediates the relationships
- Organizational symbolic brands enhance the indirect effect via career satisfaction
- Organizational instrumental brands enhance the indirect effect via perceived organizational support