

# **Participative Decision-Making and Turnover Intentions of Women in Non-Supervisory Status in US Federal Agencies: The Mediating Effect of Affective Organizational Commitment**

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This study examines how participative decision making (PDM) affects turnover intentions among women in non-supervisory positions within US federal agencies, with a focus on the mediating role of affective organizational commitment. Turnover intentions, defined as employees' conscious and deliberate willingness to leave their organization, pose a persistent challenge for the federal workforce, particularly for women in non-supervisory roles who often lack upward mobility and voice in decision-making processes. Drawing on the Social Exchange Theory, this study posits that when these employees perceive greater opportunities for participation in decision-making, they develop stronger affective commitment, which in turn reduces their intention to leave. Affective commitment refers to employees' emotional attachment to and identification with their organization and has been shown to play a critical role in shaping retention outcomes. Using data from the 2023 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), the study employs structural equation modeling to test these relationships. Results reveal that PDM has a negative direct effect on turnover intentions and a positive effect on affective commitment, which partially mediates the relationship. These findings highlight the importance of fostering inclusive decision-making practices and enhancing affective commitment to reduce turnover among female employees occupying non-supervisory level positions in federal agencies.

**Keywords:** Participative decision making, affective commitment, turnover intentions, women in non-supervisory status

## **Introduction**

Employee turnover has been of great concern among scholars and practitioners in the public and nonprofit sector due to its link to organizational performance (Cohen et al., 2016; Meier & Hicklin, 2007; Wynen & Beeck, 2014). Turnover intention is an employee's willingness to leave the

Zvobgo, V. & Jeong, J. (2026). Participative Decision-Making and Turnover Intentions of Women in Non-Supervisory Status in US Federal Agencies: The Mediating Effect of Affective Organizational Commitment. *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*.

<https://doi.org/10.20899/jpna.gs4prs31>

organization (Lazzari et al., 2022); it can be voluntary when employees choose to leave their jobs at will, and involuntary when they are dismissed. High rates of turnover result in substantial recruitment, training, and separation costs (Wynen & Beeck, 2014), reduced staff morale (Rainey, 2003), and negative effect on organizational efficiency, effectiveness, and performance (Belete, 2018). Public management researchers have extensively investigated employees' turnover behavior in the public sector (Cho & Lewis, 2012; Cohen et al., 2016; Kim & Fernandez, 2017; Lewis, 1991; Pitts, Marvel, & Fernandez, 2011; Whitford & Lee, 2015) and identified several determinants of turnover, such as the work environment, compensation, better job opportunities, organizational culture, communication, job satisfaction, commitment (Bertelli, 2007; Boxall et al., 2003; Gustafson, 2002; Mobley, 1982; Mowday & Steers, 1982; Saeed et al., 2014), and demographic characteristics such as gender, race, and age (Bertelli, 2007; Choi, 2009; Lee & Whitford, 2008). Given the negative implications of turnover intentions, human resources practitioners have over the years designed and implemented various strategies to retain skilled employees (Armstrong, 2010) and capitalize on the investments made in them (Chiboiwa, et al., 2010; Samuel & Chipunza, 2009).

This research investigates turnover intentions of women in non-supervisory positions in US federal bureaucracy, explained by participative decision making (PDM) and affective commitment as a mediator. According to research, women's intentions to leave their jobs are often linked to their perception of being undervalued by their employers (Lämsä & Piilola, 2015; Lee & Hong, 2011). Studying the perceptions of women in non-supervisory roles can reveal the experiences, possible biases, and inequalities that may unfairly affect women in those positions. The findings could help inform policies and practices that foster PDM, promote gender equality, and an inclusive work environment. In addition, by focusing on women in non-supervisory roles in federal agencies, we can assess the extent to which bureaucratic organizations characterized by top-down decision making, provide opportunities for non-supervisory employees to influence decision making, which in turn could impact on their affective commitment and turnover intentions.

Participative decision making is an important dimension of the work environment that influences employee turnover intentions (Callier, 2011). PDM refers to opportunities given to employees to contribute to the decision-making process of job-related matters (Valverde-Moreno et al., 2021b). A substantive body of literature has highlighted the important contribution of PDM to organizational outcomes (e.g., Cox et al., 2006; Huang et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2015). Organizations that foster a participative environment, experience improved organizational effectiveness, commitment, performance, motivation, and reduced turnover intentions (Appelbaum, et al., 2013; Boxall, et al, 2014; Newstrom & Davis, 2004; Posadzinska et al., 2020; Scanlan & Still, 2019; Spector, 1986; Tian & Zhai, 2019; Valverde-Moreno, et. al., 2021; Vandenberg, et al., 1999). Most research on women involvement in decision making and turnover intentions has focused on women in managerial level positions, and examined the challenges that women face in career advancement (e.g. glass ceiling), their success or challenges in leadership positions (glass cliff), and gender quotas in leadership diversity (Bowling et al., 2006; Fernández & Valiente, 2021; Hora, 2014; Hsieh & Winslow, 2006; Kerevel, 2019; Newman, 1993, 1994, 1996; Park, 2023; Riccucci, 2009; Rixom, et al., 2023; Sabharwal, 2015; Seierstad, et al., 2017). However, there is scarce research on PDM and turnover intentions of women in non-supervisory roles, in the public sector. Available research has examined the attitudes of employees in non-supervisory roles towards PDM in the private sector (Holter, 1965). This research intends to fill that gap in literature.

Empirical evidence has indicated the significance of affective commitment as a mediator in organizational research (Han, Chiang, & Chang, 2010; Knezovic & Smajic, 2022). Affective

commitment is the emotional connection that employees have towards their work, creating organizational emotional capital (Gratton, 2000), and is strongly associated with increased job satisfaction, performance, and reduced turnover intentions, (Meyer et al., 2002; Stazyk et al., 2011). Despite a significant body of research on organizational commitment (e.g. Allen & Meyer, 1990; Camp, 1994; Hanaysha, 2016; Hendri, 2019; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), there is a lack of extensive research specifically testing the mediating role of affective commitment on the relationship between PDM and turnover intentions in the federal agencies. Given the practical importance of affective commitment in improving organizational outcomes, such as performance and employee retention, it is imperative for organizations to enhance employees' affective commitment through their human resources management practices (Goldfinch & Wallis 2010; Lee & Wilkins 2011; Mastracci 2013; Nieto Morales et al., 2015; Pandey 2010; Stazyk et al., 2011).

This study uses the Social Exchange Theory (SET) to examine the relationship between PDM and turnover intentions, and the mediating effect of affective commitment, using the FEVS 2023 survey. SET suggests that interdependent relationships foster mutual understanding between employers and employees, leading to reciprocal benefits for both parties (Blau, 1964). Applying the SET, this study will shed light on how the level of PDM perceived by women in non-supervisory roles in federal agencies affects their affective commitment and intention to leave. In the following sections, we begin by reviewing the literature and develop the research hypotheses based on the SET. Following this, the study provides the data analysis and research findings. The final section discusses the research contributions to theory and practice, study limitations, and future research.

## **Theoretical Background**

### *Social Exchange Theory (SET)*

This research uses the SET as a framework to explain the relationship between PDM and turnover intentions, and the mediating effect of affective commitment. The basic premise of SET is that people make social decisions based on anticipated costs and benefits (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET involves the interdependency and interactions between parties leading to good working relationships based on reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Emerson, 1976). Researchers have applied SET to explain how the organization's human resources practices will generate positive employee attitudes and behavior (Gould-Williams, 2007; Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005; Van de Voorde, et al., 2012). When organizations look after its employees, there are social exchange relationships that are formed with the employers which "create obligations for employees to reciprocate in positive, beneficial ways" (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden 1996, p. 219). For example, when employers recognize, compensate, and care for employees' well-being, employees tend to be more committed to their work, engaged, and loyal to the organization, leading to reduced turnover intentions and absenteeism rates (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

In the context of participative decision-making (PDM) and turnover intentions, SET postulates that when employees perceive that their contributions are valued, they are likely to reciprocate by becoming committed to the organization, leading to reduced turnover intentions. Thus, organizations that support PDM create a positive social exchange environment, cultivate a sense of duty and feelings of value in employees (Fazal & Siddiqui, 2020; Goh, 2020), which in turn enhances their contribution toward achieving the goals of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades et al., 2001). This reciprocal exchange strengthens the SET relationship, which increases affective commitment to the organizations. When employees have positive attitudes

about the work environment, they develop a sense of belonging, and become connected to the organization, ultimately reducing turnover intentions (Shuck et al., 2011; Uğural et al., 2020; Yalabik et al., 2013). Drawing on these above-mentioned assumptions of the SET, we can infer that managerial policies and practices that allow PDM, will likely increase employees' affective commitment and reduce their turnover intentions.

### *Participative Decision Making (PDM) and Gender*

Recent studies on PDM have interestingly shifted focus to examining the construct through the lens of gender equality within organizations (Mooney, 2022; Shaed & Ishak, 2015; Valverde-Moreno et al., 2019). Organizations that involve both men and women in decision making at different levels of organizations constitute a gender-inclusive climate (Kossek et al., 2017; Nishii, 2013). Researchers propose that the disparity in men's and women's participation and experiences within organizational decision-making is linked to the influence of traditional gender roles and inherent gender stereotypes (Mooney, 2022). For example, women are frequently portrayed as possessing communal traits, such as being socially oriented and empathetic, whereas men are viewed through an agentic lens, defined by boldness and self-assertion (Eagly et al., 2020; Haines et al., 2016). The perceptions or stereotypes that women are less capable decision makers (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021) and occupy the lower ranks in organizations (Ridgeway & Markus, 2022), give men more influence and opportunity to participate more in decision making (Ridgeway, 2001; Ridgeway & Bourg, 2004)

Research findings on gender differences in PDM are inconsistent, with some studies showing men are more involved, others indicating greater female involvement, and some reporting no difference between genders (Kahnweiler & Thompson, 2000; Li & Qian, 2016; Pacheco & Webber, 2016; Valverde-Moreno et al., 2019; Valverde-Moreno et al., 2021b). These inconclusive results are attributed to organizational level, type of occupation (male or female typed professions) or whether the employees occupy leadership positions. For example, a study by Zin (1998) found that male non-management professional staff members reported higher levels of PDM compared to their female counterparts. Similarly, CEOs state that female executives are less frequently involved in crucial decision-making processes than their male counterparts at the same organizational level (Mooney, 2022). By engaging in decision-making, women can increase their interactions with senior leaders, which in turn enhances their opportunities for skill development and support networks, while challenging and reducing supervisor biases (Nishii, 2013). This research assesses the relationship between perceptions of PDM and turnover intentions among female, non-supervisory employees within U.S. federal agencies.

## **Literature Review and Research Hypotheses**

### *Participative Decision Making and Turnover Intentions*

PDM is a concept that emanated in the nineteenth century and has become a focal point of research in modern day (Cox et al., 2006; Salas-Vallina & Fernandez, 2017; Zhu et al., 2015). PDM involves giving employees the opportunity to provide input in the decision making process on work related matters (Valverde-Moreno et al., 2021b). PDM has been well accepted as a positive organizational element that meets the demands for meaningful and fulfilling work and contributes to increased performance (Sukirno & Siengthai, 2011). Involving employees in decision-making inspires them to achieve group goals by fostering a shared sense of responsibility for organizational outcomes (Jurburg et al., 2019; Newstrom & Davies, 2004; van Assen, 2021). Several studies have found a negative relationship between PDM and turnover intentions

(Magbity et al., 2020; Panicker & Sharma, 2020; Paros, 2021; Posadzinska, et al., 2020; Spector, 1986; Vandenberg, et al., 1999). Recognition through involvement in PDM, signals to employees that their ideas are valued by the organization, which reduces their intention to leave the organization (Posadzinska, et al., 2020; Scanlan & Still, 2019).

The SET offers insights into how PDM can reduce turnover intentions, by pointing out how employees observe and react to the value they are given by the organization. Employees who sense that their contributions through PDM are appreciated, are likely to reciprocate positively through increased commitment, loyalty, and reduced turnover intentions (Settoon et al., 1996). Involving women in non-supervisory roles in decision making creates gender inclusive work environments (Kossek et al., 2017; Nishii, 2013), which cultivates positive work attitudes and organizational outcomes. We propose that PDM of women in non-supervisory status creates mutual understanding, and a sense of obligation to reciprocate, which can lead to reduced turnover intentions. Therefore, based on the SET perspective the following hypothesis is proposed:

*Hypothesis 1:* There will be a negative relationship between perceptions of PDM and Turnover Intentions of women in non-supervisory status in US Federal agencies.

#### *Affective Commitment as a mediator between PDM and Turnover Intentions*

Organizational commitment is defined as the level to which an individual identifies with and is involved in the organization (Porter et al., 1974), it also involves psychological attachment to the organization (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Similarly, Mowday et al., (1979, p. 226), defined organizational commitment as “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization.” They outline organizational commitment as a strong belief in the goals of the organization, employees’ willingness to expend effort on the behalf of the organization, and the desire to remain a member of the organization. Mowday et al., (1979) stressed the role of organizational commitment in employees’ turnover intentions. Subsequent work on organizational commitment by Meyer et. al., (1990) developed a three-dimensional measure of organizational commitment: continuance, normative, and affective commitment.

Out of the three forms of organizational commitment, this study focused on affective commitment, as it directly indicates a positive feeling toward work and the organization (Solinger, Van Olffen, & Roe, 2008). The central feature of affective commitment is the emotional connection that employees have towards their work, creating organizational emotional capital (Gratton, 2000). Scholars have explained the importance of affective commitment and its effects on turnover intentions (Blau, 1986; Meyer & Allen, 1990, 1997; Mowday et al., 1982; Shepherd & Mathews, 2000). Meyer et al., (2002) concluded that compared to the other forms of commitment, affective commitment was the strongest predictor of employee turnover intentions.

Understanding the effects of affective commitment of women in non-supervisory roles in federal agencies is important for identifying potential challenges, and biases that women in lower occupational levels may face due to structural or institutional discrimination in organizational practices (Hing et al., 2023), which may negatively impact on their attachment to the organization. For example, institutional discrimination against women can manifest through personnel policies, impacting areas such as recruitment, selection, job assignments, training opportunities, compensation, performance reviews, promotion prospects, and termination processes (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). Compared to men, women are likely to receive fewer opportunities at work, thereby creating a bottleneck that limits their advancement into the high level responsibilities of the organization (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Martell et al., 1996). Career ladders also illustrate institutional discrimination within an organization's formal structure because these career paths are typically segregated by gender (Perry et al., 1994). This study

underscores the necessity for public organizations to cultivate gender-inclusive environments, ensuring that women in non-supervisory roles feel valued, are involved in decision-making, and are respected.

In this research we employ affective commitment as a mediator, based on scholars who have highlighted that the effects of job outcomes can be made salient through mediators (Campbell et al., 1993). Literature has indicated that affective commitment plays a dominant role as a mediating variable (Renkema et al., 2021). For example, affective commitment was found to play a mediating role between organizational support and organizational citizenship behavior (Liu, 2009), leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (Khaola & Rambe, 2021), and organizational justice and job performance (Swalhi, et al., 2017). Applying the SET, we suggest that PDM increases affective commitment of women in non-supervisory positions because they would feel more empowered, supported, and valued by the organization. In exchange, they would become attached to the organization and identify with the organization's goals and objectives, and as a form of reciprocity, employees would wish to remain with the organization (Griffeth et al., 2000; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Tett & Meyer, 1993).

The mediating role of affective commitment in the relationship between PDM and turnover intentions can be theoretically grounded in SET. Participative decision-making enhances employees' perception of being respected, heard, and valued by the organization, which strengthens their emotional attachment and identification with the organization's goals (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This emotional attachment, captured by affective commitment, serves as a motivational force that increases employees' desire to remain within the organization (Meyer et al., 2002). In this light, affective commitment functions not merely as an outcome of PDM, but as a key psychological pathway through which participative practices reduce the likelihood of turnover. Without this emotional bond, PDM may not necessarily translate into long-term retention, particularly in contexts where structural barriers or limited upward mobility persist. Thus, we propose that the presence of affective commitment as a mediator will reduce women in non-supervisory roles turnover intentions due to the emotional attachment and bond to their work, goals, and the organization. The following hypotheses are proposed:

*Hypothesis 2:* Affective Commitment will have a negative mediating effect on the relationship between PDM and Turnover Intentions of women in nonsupervisory status in US federal agencies.

*Hypothesis 3:* There will be a positive association between PDM and Affective Commitment of women in non-supervisory status in US federal agencies.

## **Data and Methods**

The data for this study comes from the 2023 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), which measures federal employees' experiences with the policies, practices, and procedures instituted in various agencies. The survey is administered to all federal employees in participating agencies by the US Office of Personnel Management (OPM). A total of 625,568 federal employees completed the survey, a total of 39 % response rate. However, after filtering the data to focus on women in non-supervisory positions, it resulted in the final analytical sample of 217,408 cases.

*Dependent Variable: Turnover Intentions*

Turnover intentions were measured by a survey question asking respondents whether they were considering leaving their current organization within the next year. The original survey item stated: “Are you considering leaving your organization within the next year, and if so, why?”. Responses were recoded into a binary variable: individuals who answered “Yes, other,” “Yes, to take another job within the Federal Government,” or “Yes, to take another job outside the Federal Government” were coded as 1 (intending to leave), while those who answered “No” were coded as 0 (not intending to leave).

#### *Independent Variable: Participative Decision Making (PDM)*

PDM was measured using two survey items: (1) “Management involves employees in decisions that affect their work” and (2) “How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work?” Respondents rated their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The two items were averaged to create an index, which demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .85$ ).

#### *Mediating Variable: Affective Commitment*

Affective commitment was measured using a three survey items consisting of the following statements: (1) “I recommend my organization as a good place to work,” (2) “My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment,” and (3) “I feel a strong personal attachment to my organization.” Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The three items were averaged to form a composite measure. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .83$ ).

#### *Control Variables*

This study includes several control variables known to influence workplace perceptions and turnover intentions: race, age, tenure, and military service. Race was coded as a binary variable, with respondents identifying as White coded as 1 and all others as 0. Age was dichotomized to distinguish younger employees (under 40 years old = 1) from older employees (40 and above = 0), capturing differences in career stage, labor market mobility, and work-related attitudes that are associated with organizational attachment and turnover intentions (Griffeth et al., 2000; Ng & Feldman, 2009). Prior research suggests that younger employees tend to have greater external job opportunities and higher mobility, whereas older workers are more likely to be embedded in their organizations and less inclined to leave, which can shape how participative decision-making is evaluated and experienced. Tenure was treated as an ordered categorical variable (10 years or fewer = 1, 11 to 20 years = 2, and more than 20 years = 3) to reflect meaningful differences in organizational embeddedness and accumulated institutional experience. Employees with longer tenure tend to have stronger social ties, greater investments in the organization, and higher switching costs, all of which are associated with lower turnover intentions and stronger organizational commitment (Griffeth et al., 2000; Mitchell et al., 2001).

Military service was included as a dummy variable (1 = prior service, 0 = no service), given evidence that military experience shapes organizational socialization, leadership expectations, and norms related to hierarchy and authority in civilian public-sector workplaces (Bowling et al., 2006; Perry, 1996). By controlling for these demographic and experiential characteristics, the analysis more accurately isolates the associations among participative decision-making, affective commitment, and turnover intentions.

#### *Data Analysis*

This study employs structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships among participative decision-making (PDM), affective organizational commitment, and turnover intentions among women in non-supervisory positions in U.S. federal agencies. Specifically, the model tests the mediating role of affective commitment in the relationship between PDM and turnover intentions. SEM is well-suited for this analysis, as it enables the simultaneous estimation of multiple relationships and the evaluation of both direct and indirect effects within a unified framework (Kline, 2016). Multiple imputation (MI) was conducted using predictive mean matching (PMM), a robust method that generates plausible values based on observed data distributions. MI is preferable to listwise deletion, as it reduces bias and preserves statistical power (Rubin, 1987; Schafer & Graham, 2002). As noted earlier on, the original dataset included 625,568 observations, however, after filtering to retain only female respondents in non-supervisory roles, the final analytical sample consisted of 217,408 cases.

Table 1 below presents the descriptive statistics for the key variables used in this study. The dependent variable, turnover intentions, has a mean of 0.32 (SD = 0.47), indicating that approximately one-third of female non-supervisory respondents reported considering leaving their organization within the next year. The mean score for participative decision-making (PDM) is 3.30 (SD = 1.12), and for affective organizational commitment, 3.81 (SD = 0.93), both measured on a five-point Likert scale. Among the control variables, 61% of respondents identified as White, 29% were under the age of 40, 12% reported prior military service, and the average tenure category was 1.76, reflecting a concentration in the 11–20 years range. To assess multicollinearity, variance inflation factor (VIF) scores were examined. All values ranged from 1.01 to 1.88, well below the conventional threshold of 10 (Kutner et al., 2005; O’Brien, 2007), indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

**TABLE 1.** Descriptive Statistics: Means and Standard Deviations

| Variable             | Obs.    | Mean | Std Dev | Min | Max | VIF  |
|----------------------|---------|------|---------|-----|-----|------|
| Turnover             |         | 0.32 | 0.47    | 0   | 1   |      |
| PDM                  |         | 3.30 | 1.12    | 1   | 5   | 1.88 |
| Affective Commitment |         | 3.81 | 0.93    | 1   | 5   | 1.88 |
| White                | 217,408 | 0.61 | 0.49    | 0   | 1   | 1.01 |
| Age                  |         | 0.29 | 0.46    | 0   | 1   | 1.31 |
| Tenure years         |         | 1.76 | 0.80    | 1   | 3   | 1.29 |
| Military Service     |         | 0.12 | 0.32    | 0   | 1   | 1.01 |

Table 2 presents the correlation matrix among the study variables. As expected, all correlations are in the anticipated directions and remain within acceptable ranges. Together with the low VIF scores, these results suggest that multicollinearity is not a concern in this dataset and that the variables are sufficiently distinct for inclusion in multivariate models.

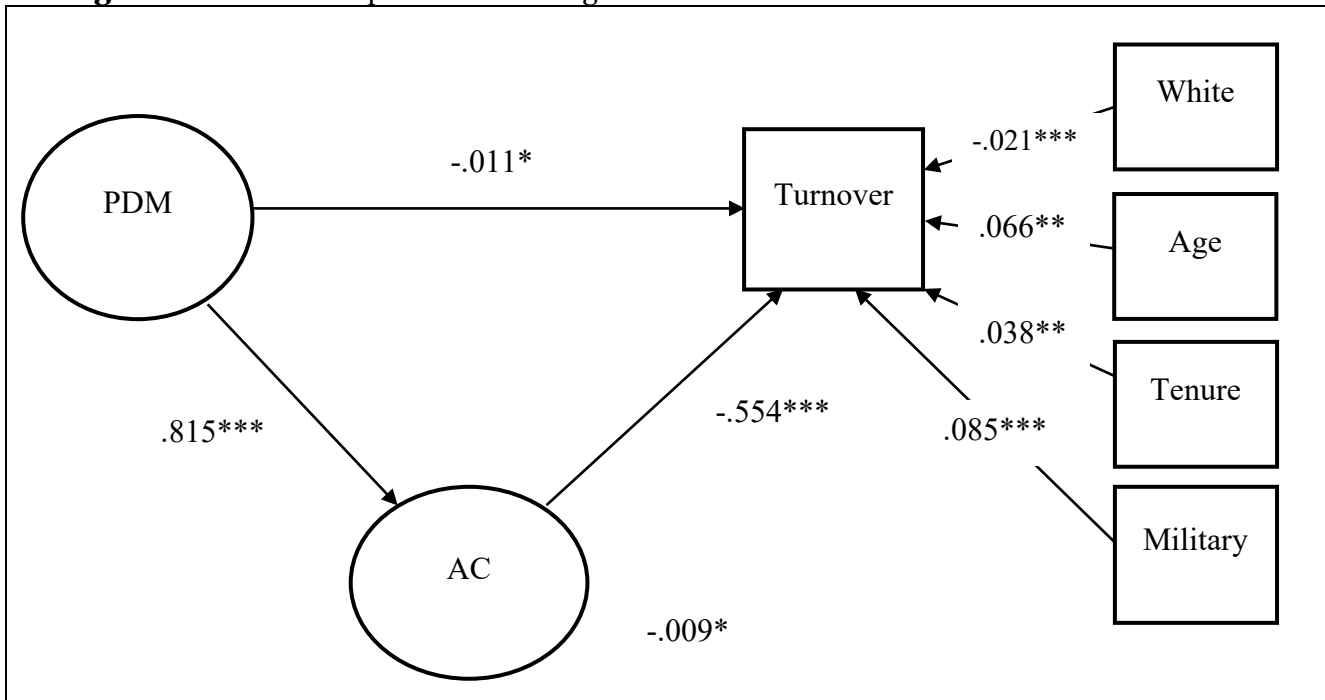
**TABLE 2.** Correlation Matrix

|                         | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     | 7 |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| Turnover                | 1     |       |       |       |       |       |   |
| PDM                     | -0.34 | 1     |       |       |       |       |   |
| Affective<br>Commitment | -0.43 | 0.68  | 1     |       |       |       |   |
| White                   | -0.02 | -0.04 | 0.03  | 1     |       |       |   |
| Age                     | -0.03 | -0.01 | -0.04 | 0.04  | 1     |       |   |
| Tenure years            | 0.00  | -0.01 | 0.01  | -0.03 | -0.47 | 1     |   |
| Military Service        | 0.06  | 0.01  | -0.03 | -0.04 | 0.10  | -0.02 | 1 |

*Research Findings*

This section presents the results of structural equation modeling (SEM) used to examine the relationships between participative decision-making (PDM), affective organizational commitment, and turnover intentions among women in non-supervisory roles in US federal agencies. Figure 1 below illustrates the standardized path estimates, and Table 3 summarizes the direct, indirect, and total effects associated with the tested hypotheses.

**Figure 1.** Structural Equation Modelling with Standardized Estimates



Note: Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.022, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.988, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.993, and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.015.

**TABLE 3.** Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects Estimations

| Variables      | Direct Effects | Indirect Effects | Total Effects |
|----------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|
| PDM → Turnover | -0.011*        | -0.009*          | -0.020*       |
| PDM → AC       | .815***        | -                | .815***       |
| AC → TI        | -.554***       | -                | -.554***      |

\*  $p < .1$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$

Model fit indices indicate that the model fits the data well: RMSEA = 0.022, CFI = 0.988, TLI = 0.993, and SRMR = 0.015. These values fall within conventional thresholds for acceptable fit, suggesting excellent model adequacy (Hu & Bentler, 1999). All items significantly loaded onto their respective latent constructs. Factor loadings for affective commitment ranged from 0.714 to 0.863, and for PDM ranged from 0.831 to 0.900, indicating strong convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010).

Hypothesis 1 predicted a negative relationship between PDM and turnover intentions. This hypothesis was marginally supported, with a total effect of PDM on turnover intentions of  $\beta = -0.020$  ( $p < .1$ ), comprising a direct effect of  $\beta = -0.011$  ( $p < .1$ ) and an indirect effect of  $\beta = -0.009$  ( $p < .1$ ) through affective commitment. Hypothesis 2, which posited that affective commitment mediates the relationship between PDM and turnover intentions, was also marginally supported. The mediating path showed a statistically marginal indirect effect of  $\beta = -0.009$  ( $p < .1$ ), reflecting a significant positive association between PDM and affective commitment ( $\beta = 0.815$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and a significant negative association between affective commitment and turnover intentions ( $\beta = -0.554$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Hypothesis 3 was fully supported. PDM significantly and positively predicted affective commitment ( $\beta = 0.815$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that participatory practices substantially foster employees' emotional attachment to their organizations.

In addition to the primary variables, several control variables were included in the model to account for potential confounding factors. Among them, race (White) had a small but statistically significant negative association with turnover intentions ( $\beta = -0.021$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that White employees were slightly less likely to report intentions to leave their organization compared to others. Age (coded as under 40 = 1) showed a positive relationship with turnover intentions ( $\beta = 0.066$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that younger employees were more likely to consider leaving. Tenure was also positively related to turnover intentions ( $\beta = 0.038$ ,  $p < .001$ ), implying that those with longer service were slightly more likely to report an intention to leave. Lastly, military service had a notable positive effect ( $\beta = 0.085$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that individuals with military backgrounds were more likely to consider leaving their federal position. These results highlight

demographic and experiential differences that may shape turnover intentions, reinforcing the importance of including such controls in models examining organizational behavior. These findings collectively suggest that enhancing participative decision-making may reduce turnover intentions both directly and indirectly by increasing affective commitment, particularly among women in non-supervisory roles in federal agencies.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study assessed the relationship between PDM and turnover intentions, and the mediating role of affective commitment of women in non-supervisory status in US federal agencies. The research contributes to existing theory by using large-scale federal data to empirically analyze the gender-specific relationship between PDM and turnover intentions among women in non-supervisory status. Extant research regarding female participation in decision-making processes has predominantly concentrated on women occupying formal leadership positions or the systemic barriers impeding their professional advancement (Sabharwal, 2015; Lakshmi & Prasanth, 2018). The study also contributes to the theoretical landscape by conducting a mediation analysis of affective commitment on the relationship between PDM and turnover intentions.

The findings indicate marginal support for Hypothesis 1, which predicted a negative correlation between PDM and employee turnover intentions. Although marginal, the result is consistent with previous literature which found a negative relationship between the same variables (e.g. Posadzinska et al., 2020; Scanlan & Still, 2019; Spector, 1986; Vandenberg et al., 1999). This finding suggests that while involving women in non-supervisory status in decision making can reduce turnover intentions in US federal agencies, the effect is not very strong. Possible explanations could be the bureaucratic nature of federal agencies which may reduce the actual power or influence of employees in non-supervisory roles, even when they are involved in decision making processes. For example, in hierarchical organizations, input from lower ranked employees may be altered or overlooked because ultimate authority for decisions rests with senior management (Irawanto, 2015). In addition, because they may lack the full scope of information and strategic context available to senior leaders, the input of non-supervisory employees in broader decision-making platforms may be less effective and perceived as having limited value. Johnson's (2000) research in a large government service agency, found that supervisors perceived more participation and involvement in decision making than non-supervisors, a finding that can be explained by the hierarchical structure of organizations and the typical roles and responsibilities that distinguish supervisors from non-supervisors. Greater opportunities to participate in decision making are much higher at the "top echelons of the bureaucracy" (Johnson, 2000, p. 125). Other studies found that women reported lower involvement in PDM due to their organizational level and positions (Pacheco & Webber, 2016; Ridgeway & Markus, 2022; Valverde-Moreno et al., 2019).

Secondly, the research also examined affective commitment as a mediator between PDM and turnover intentions. The results provided marginal support for Hypothesis 2, which predicted that affective commitment would have a negative mediating effect between PDM and turnover intentions. Despite the partial mediating effect, this finding is supported by previous research which found that affective commitment plays a role as a mediating variable (e.g. Liu, 2009; Khaola & Rambe, 2021; Renkema et al., 2021; Swalhi, et al., 2017). The marginal effect of affective commitment can also suggest that while affective commitment is known to reduce turnover intentions, other possible factors may be worth noting. For example, research has found that women in lower ranks of the organization may be susceptible to gender stereotypes, lack of work life balance, or room for career advancement (Lakshmi & Prasanth, 2018; Sabharwal, 2015),

which can in turn, overshadow the positive effects of affective commitment. Lastly, the predicted positive association between PDM and affective commitment (Hypotheses 3) was supported. This result aligns with prior research showing a positive association between PDM and affective commitment to the organization (Ogu, 2024; Raineri, 2017; Rogiest, et al., 2015). When women in non-supervisory roles perceive they are included in the decision-making process, it increases their affective commitment to their agencies.

## **Theoretical Implications**

The current study demonstrates that the concepts proposed by SET proponents (e.g. Blau, 1964) are applicable within the context of US federal agencies. Consistent with SET, increased employee involvement in PDM reduced the likelihood of non-supervisory women leaving U.S. federal jobs. When employees feel that their contributions are valued by the organization, they reciprocate through loyalty to the organization leading to reduced turnover intentions (Posadzinska et al., 2020; Scanlan & Still, 2019). Although the result is marginal, it illustrates a reciprocal exchange underlying the theoretical framework. This limited impact can be attributed to the fundamental limitations within top-down management structures, which can undermine the social exchange relationships that PDM typically fosters. In addition, in line with SET, employees continually weigh the cost and benefit of their relationship with the organization and when the perceived costs of involvement in PDM exceed the actual influence gained (benefits), it can lead to diminishing returns of PDM and the expected effect on turnover intentions.

The partial mediating effect of affective commitment on the relationship between PDM and turnover intentions is an indicator that organizations' practices will generate positive employee attitudes and behavior (Gould-Williams, 2007; Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005; Van de Voorde, et al., 2012) which ultimately reduce turnover intentions (Uğural et al., 2020). The finding supports the underpinnings of SET, by suggesting that when women in non-supervisory status perceive a positive exchange through their involvement in PDM, it fosters a sense of belonging and motivates them to reciprocate through becoming emotionally attached to their agencies. However, the partial mediation indicates that while affective commitment is a result of positive social exchange, (e.g. involving employees in PDM), other factors, such as contextual factors and individual differences, could also have a direct impact on organizational outcomes (Cotton, et al., 1988). Rigid structures and processes in federal agencies, can affect the positive exchange that typically strengthens affective commitment which may result in a partial mediation on the relationship between employees' PDM and their intent to leave the organization.

## **Practical Implications**

This research has several practical implications on the public sector. The practical implications of the marginal negative effect between PDM and turnover intentions are that bureaucratic structures, most prevalent in public sector organizations potentially limit ideas or contributions of employees from the lower levels of the organization. Decentralizing authority is one way of ensuring broader involvement of employees from the lower ranks to contribute to decision making (Kellogg, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2006; van Baarle et al., 2021). In addition, managers should continuously involve women in non-supervisory positions in PDM as this promotes a more gender inclusive and equitable work environment, where they feel that their contributions are valued which in turn would improve employee retention (Kossek et al., 2017; Nishii, 2013). To attain gender equality in organizations, leaders should prioritize PDM and provide opportunities for women to contribute to decision making (Plückelmann et al., 2024). Managers can enhance

the effectiveness of PDM by mentoring women in lower ranks on how to effectively contribute to decision-making processes (Ye, et al., 2022). Mentoring has been shown to enhance employee confidence and develop key skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking (Jeske & Linehan, 2020). This encourages employees to share valuable insights, strengthening their commitment and reducing their likelihood of leaving (Craig, et al., 2012).

To address the partial mediation of affective commitment between PDM and turnover, managers must look beyond PDM and implement further strategies to solidify employees' emotional attachment to the organization. Kumar and Jauhari (2016) found that simply ensuring employee involvement in decision making is not enough to reduce employee turnover intentions, if other needs and expectations for job satisfaction and fairness are not met by the organization. They suggest that management must ensure extensive measures for procedural fairness, as a foundational element of the organization's structure before enabling employee participation. Alternative research indicates that mitigating turnover requires a multifaceted strategy beyond just PDM. Essential elements include fostering a positive work environment, ensuring fair compensation, and providing opportunities for career development and growth (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). Furthermore, establishing a supportive, inclusive environment where employees at all levels contribute to decision making is important (Fattah et al., 2022; Perreira et al., 2018), as is the implementation of family-friendly policies such as flexible remote or hybrid work arrangements (Bloom et al., 2024). If employees believe these or other essential components are missing from their work environment, their involvement in PDM may not influence their intent to leave as expected. If employees believe these or other essential components are missing from their work environment, their involvement in PDM may not influence their intent to leave as expected. Managers in the federal workforce and public sector in general “should influence, nurture, and encourage employee’s commitment through the agency culture, meeting their expectations about work, and being sensitive to the dynamics surrounding the commitment process” (Romzek, 1990, p. 8). Managers are encouraged to put in place mechanisms that generate affective commitment of female employees in lower positions in federal agencies, as this not only improves retention, but increases agency effectiveness, engagement, and positive work environment (Park & Rainey, 2007).

## **Limitations and Future Research**

There are some limitations to note in this study. First, the survey responses are limited to the US federal agencies; therefore, results may not be generalized to employees working outside federal agencies. Future research may consider doing comparative analysis with different levels of government and sectors. This research focused on women in nonsupervisory status; to explore differences based on gender, future research can examine the perceptions of PDM, affective commitment, and turnover intentions of men in nonsupervisory status. Future research could delve into the intersectionality of race and gender to gain a more nuanced understanding of how these identities uniquely combine to shape employees' experiences. Another suggestion for future research would be to examine the relationship between the research variables from an agency type perspective, for example regulatory agencies (i.e. male dominated agencies, mostly concerned with policy making and implementation) and redistributive agencies (female dominated agencies). The findings could show important differences in gender-inclusive work environments and PDM of women in non-supervisory roles, with a focus on how these factors differ between male-dominated and female-dominated federal agencies and their impact affective commitment and turnover intentions. In addition, employees' prior work experience and access to flexible work arrangements, such as remote or hybrid work, may shape how they evaluate participative

decision-making and how it translates into commitment and turnover intentions. Because the secondary survey used in this study does not include measures of these factors, they could not be incorporated into the analysis. Future research should consider these contextual influences to better capture heterogeneity in employees' work experiences. In terms of methodology, we used a single source, cross-sectional data, which limits our analysis and ability to make causal claims on the relationships among variables. In addition, this design raises the possibility of endogeneity and reverse causality, as employees with higher affective commitment may perceive participative decision-making more positively. Although our theoretical framework emphasizes PDM as an antecedent of commitment and turnover intentions, future research using longitudinal or panel data would be better suited to address causal ordering. Finally, further studies may conduct semi structured interviews to gather more in-depth data regarding the variables under study. Despite these limitations, the present study provides important empirical findings for the importance of affective commitment as a mediator between PDM and turnover intentions of women in non-supervisory status in federal agencies.

### **Disclosure Statement**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Data Availability Statement**

Data in this study is publicly available

### **Funding**

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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