



TOXIC WORKPLACE DYNAMICS AND EXECUTIVE TURNOVER: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF NEGATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE ON SENIOR LEADERSHIP ATTRITION

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ABSTRACT: *Executive turnover, conversely, creates strategic and operational challenges for unfurling organizations, often interrupting leadership continuity, morale, and long-term performance. This study attempts to investigate how senior staff attrition creeps in due to negative energy-labeled behaviors that include toxic behavior, bad leadership, bad recognition, and interpersonal conflict. The analysis involved a sequential mixed methods approach-analyzing survey response from 150 high-level professionals, along with conducting in-depth interviews from a purposively selected sample of 20 respondents. Quantitative findings affirm that there is a significant positive correlation between perceived negative energy and turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.61, p < 0.01$), with a great 72% of respondents indicating a considerable intention to leave due to exposure to toxic workplace conditions. Thematic analysis from qualitative data supported these findings, establishing that executive disengagement was significantly driven by leadership failure, unresolved conflicts, and emotional exhaustion. Based on the JD-R model and Social Exchange Theory, the study propounds that negative workplace dynamics deplete essential psychological and organizational resources.*

KEYWORDS: Executive Turnover; Toxic Workplace; Negative Energy; Organizational Behavior.



INTRODUCTION

With the dynamic and competitive nature of the current business environment, the success and longevity of any organization depend on retaining employees with top talent. Executive turnover has profound effects, interrupting leadership continuity, diminishing institutional memory, impeding strategic initiatives, and raising recruitment and onboarding costs (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010). While the general causes of employee turnover have been widely studied, factors that drive senior staff turnover have been somewhat less well researched. One of the new factors that is worth examining in greater detail is negative energy at work. This can be shown in the form of toxic behavior, leadership problems, interpersonal tension, and lack of recognition. These collectively play a role in creating a poison work environment that undermines job satisfaction and lowers retention, particularly at advanced levels (Frost, 2003; Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). Negative workplace energy, although often not visible, more recently has been found to be a key driver of employee disengagement and turnover. Toxic work environments are characterized by poor communication, micromanaging, workplace incivility, lack of appreciation, and inept conflict resolution (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory proposes that these environments deplete core job resources: autonomy, feedback, and support, and cause emotional exhaustion and withdrawal (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Similarly, Social Exchange Theory (SET) outlines that employees will withdraw their contribution or resign if they perceive organizational relationships to be unbalanced or unrewarding (Blau, 1964). These theoretical perspectives suggest that negative energy is not merely a morale issue but also a structural and relational issue affecting the psychological contract between organizational employees and their organizations.

Senior-level individuals are particularly vulnerable to the pressures of negative workplace energies. They are not similar to entry-level employees, as they have more independence, expect greater respect for each other, and more strategic ownership in organizational goals. Where these are disillusioned, by chronic negativity, organizational politics, or leadership failure, these will likely disengage or leave (Zhang et al., 2022). In addition, upper-level turnover is costlier and more disruptive than lower-level attrition since senior personnel typically steward strategic portfolios, lead large teams, and possess irreplaceable institutional knowledge (Hancock et al., 2013). In contrast to these stakes, the extant literature is nevertheless disproportionately concentrated on turnover of general staff, creating a major gap in the appreciation of the specific dynamics behind executive departures (Hom, Lee, Shaw, & Hausknecht, 2017). A number of recent studies have underlined the increasing salience of toxic behavior at work in employee turnover across industries. McKinsey & Company (2022) found toxic culture to be the best individual predictor of employee turnover, surpassing pay, job insecurity, and work-life balance. Similarly, recent research in the healthcare, university, and hospitality sectors has shown that negative energy, expressed through bullying, ostracism, and communication problems, seems highly correlated with burnout and intention to leave (Okan et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022; Barling et al., 2021). However, there are numerous of such studies that are context-specific and only focus on frontline or mid-level staff. The lack of empirical studies with high-level personnel and their negative energy experiences is a significant deficiency in organizational behavior studies. The other gap is the absence of mixed-methods studies examining both the quantitative trends and qualitative experiences of negative energy among senior personnel. Whereas the survey evidence may be able to measure levels of turnover intentions and dissatisfaction, they will typically fail to capture the rich



relational dynamics that underlie a leader's decision to depart. A mixed-method design, combined with large-scale surveys and intensive interviews, provides a richer insight into the phenomenon, although there are very few studies that employed such a design within senior-level turnover (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Moreover, there is scant applied research that translates findings into organizational interventions.

The current study hopes to bridge these gaps by studying the relationship between negative workplace energy and high-level staff turnover using a sequential mixed-methods approach. The study will survey 150 senior staff across different industries to assess the role of toxic behaviors, lack of recognition, and interpersonal conflict towards their turnover intentions. In addition, 20 semi-structured interviews will be utilized to analyze personal narratives and experiences of negative energy at executive levels. Integrating the methods above will facilitate the research to transcend surface patterns and uncover more profound understandings of the ways and reasons negative energy leads to senior staff turnover. Theoretically, this research extends the JD-R model and Social Exchange Theory to an under-studied population—executive staff. By identifying how job resources (e.g., autonomy, support, recognition) are undercut in toxic environments, and how undermining of such resources impacts perceptions of fairness and trust in organizational relationships, the study adds a new dimension in understanding turnover intentions in strategic employees. In doing so, it contributes to the current organizational behavior literature linking psychological well-being and performance and retention outcomes (Barsade & O'Neill, 2016; Kiewitz et al., 2022). Practically, the research offers actionable guidance for organizational development consultants, executives, and human resource professionals. Outcomes will inform strategy in formats such as leadership coaching, formal employee recognition schemes, conflict resolution processes, and organizational culture surveys. These interventions, when applied on purpose, can help decrease the negative consequences of negative energy, enhance job satisfaction, and improve executive retention. Due to the strategic impact senior leaders exert in shaping culture and performance, tackling their work environment is not just an HR issue, it is a leadership imperative. The expected contributions of this research are threefold. First, it produces empirical evidence on the link between negative energy and high-level staff turnover, previously a little-studied area. Second, it uses a multi-level analysis that combines survey data and qualitative accounts to clarify the psychosocial processes by which toxic climates affect executive decisions. Third, it provides working models that can be applied by organizations to identify and resist sources of negative energy, and thus improve long-term staff retention and organizational resilience.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model, developed by Demerouti and Bakker, provides a fair view of how work conditions affect employees' outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The model juxtaposes job demands, such as workload, conflict, and emotional demands, and job resources like autonomy, recognition, and social support. According to this model, negative energy, by way of toxic leadership, poor communication, and absence of recognition, can be considered a chronic job demand. When these needs are left unmet by adequate resources, they instigate resource depletion, burnout, and turnover intention (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Such



dynamics have empirical backing. Weberg et al. (2019) found that toxic leadership correlated with burnout and turnover among health professionals. Similarly, a study in MDPI (2023) positively established that high emotional demands accompanied by low support predicted withdrawal behaviors in education and public health departments. However, few JD-R studies have focused on frontline or mid-level employees, excluding executives. This is a critical oversight, given that senior leaders face high-stakes demands and rely on intangible capitals like trust and strategic autonomy. When these are undermined by toxic climates, disengagement and turnover can ensue (Tummers & Bakker, 2021; Van Woerkom et al., 2016). Validating the JD-R model among executive turnover thus provides valuable insight into sustainability in leadership.

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET), developed by Blau (1964), offers a robust account of employee turnover and attitudes. Reciprocity underpins relationships in the workplace, argues the theory, with employees being committed when they believe that received benefits (e.g., respect, recognition, support) outweigh costs incurred (e.g., stress, workload). If the balance is disrupted, especially by the perception of inequity or breached trust, employees will psychologically withdraw, disengage, or leave the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Negative energy within this study, via poisonous leadership, inadequate communication, or lack of acknowledgment, means that there has been a breakdown in the social exchange. Such behavior signifies that employee effort is devalued, eroding trust and equity (Rousseau, 1995). Senior personnel, nonetheless, rely on mutual respect, discretionary autonomy, and being included. If these expectations are breached, executives reassess the cost-benefit ratio and go higher up the probability of exit (Judge et al., 2001). Empirical studies validate these trends. Akca (2017) linked abusive supervision to turnover via psychological contract violations. Jantjies and Botha (2024) and MDPI (2024) emphasized the buffering role of perceived support in attenuating attrition. This study extends SET by focusing on top leaders—a quite under researched group, highlighting how reciprocity failure at the executive level drives disengagement and turnover.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, or Motivation-Hygiene Theory, distinguishes motivators (e.g., achievement, recognition) that lead to satisfaction from hygiene factors (e.g., supervision, policies, interpersonal relations), whose absence leads to dissatisfaction and turnover (Herzberg et al., 1959). In this study, negative workplace energy, manifest as toxic leadership, exclusion, or communication—is a deficiency of hygiene factors. While these conditions may not decrease intrinsic motivation, they create dissatisfaction that erodes morale and intensifies exit behavior. For senior management, these collapses of hygiene are especially corrosive. Having high expectations for respect, autonomy, and strategic impact themselves, employees at higher levels are less tolerant of contexts that compromise psychological safety or professional dignity (Kvale, 1996). These are less about maximizing motivation and more about preventing dissatisfaction that erodes organizational commitment. Empirical evidence supports Herzberg's theory. Boamah et al. (2018) found poor leadership and communication as reasons for turnover in nursing managers, but Alshmemri et al. (2017) linked interpersonal conflict with overall job dissatisfaction across all industries. However, little research examines these effects within executives. This research closes that gap by using Herzberg's theory to examine senior-level turnover, showing how breakdowns in hygiene factors such as exclusion



from decisions or poisonous leadership can trigger strategic departures, emphasizing the central position of work culture in retaining executives

Empirical Literature Review

Empirical research in various industries has consistently highlighted a strong correlation between a toxic workplace environment and employees quitting. Such toxic workplace dynamics occur through toxic leadership, negative organizational culture, and abusive supervision. Yet, even though the broader correlation has been well-established, there remains a gap regarding how such dynamics affect top executives.

Toxic Leadership and Turnover Intentions

More and more evidence indicates that abusive leadership styles such as micromanaging, verbal cruelty, narcissism, favoritism, and lack of empathy are highly correlated with increased employee turnover (Schyns et al., 2011; Pelletier, 2010). These managers build fear-based, distrusting cultures that lower morale and psychological safety and result in emotional exhaustion and voluntary turnover. MDPI in 2023 research found toxic leadership had strong prediction for emotional exhaustion and turnover in healthcare, education, and nonprofits (Kim & Kweon, 2023). Micromanagement, which is another form of toxic behavior, undermines autonomy and confidence. Alarcon et al. (2021) explained that employees who were being overcontrolled perceived themselves as "disempowered" and were more likely to seek out respectful workplace environments. Similarly, managers' failure to give recognition and empathy is also characterized as a breach of the psychological contract, lowering trust and increasing turnover (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Toxicity spreads across teams, as toxic leaders employ similarly oriented subordinates, embedding dysfunction into organizational culture (Padilla et al., 2007). Short-term there can be occasional benefits, but ultimately, such leadership harms retention and well-being (Gallus et al., 2013). The vicious cycle is apparent: where toxic leadership is permitted to persist, emotional resources degrade, morale deteriorates, and turnover accelerates, eroding serious danger to organizational stability and long-term achievement.

Organizational Culture as an Amplifier of Toxicity

Organizational culture frames how people connect, how leadership is enacted, and how values are realized in the work setting. Far from a passive backdrop, culture actively enables or prevents actions, inclusive of toxic leadership. Literature suggests that toxic behavior thrives in cultures that are marked by fear, exclusion, and injustice, and which often lack accountability and reward control-oriented behaviors (Schein & Schein, 2016; Masondo & van Dyk, 2023). Employees in such settings experience stress, disengagement, and turnover, driven not just by individual leaders but by shared cultural norms. A large study by Sull, Sull, and Zweig (2022) found that toxic culture is over ten times more predictive of attrition than compensation. Disrespect, unethical behavior, and non-transparency are some of the factors that tend to reflect and reinforce toxic leadership. Cultural entrenchment, where the negative behaviors become routine, makes reform difficult (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017). For top leaders, the cost is higher. Executives who find themselves in cultures that suppress dissent or reward loyalty over integrity can choose to leave to protect their reputations and values (Ghosh, 2017). Leadership development alone is insufficient without culture change. Lasting solutions require systemic reforms with a priority for empathy, transparency, and psychological safety (Edmondson,



2019). Culture, after all, can buffer or amplify toxicity, and must be at the center of retention efforts.

Abusive Supervision and Reduced Organizational Commitment

Abusive supervision, the sustained hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors of supervisors (Tepper, 2000), is perhaps the most risky manifestation of poisonous leadership, having strong adverse impacts on employee morale, commitment, and turnover. Unlike intermittent managerial mistakes, it is chronic and systematic, and can involve public humiliation, blaming, and deliberate undermining. Empirical evidence links abusive supervision with job dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion, reduced commitment, and increased turnover intentions (Mackey et al., 2017; Zhang & Bednall, 2016), even among high-paid and long-time employees. The main drivers of these effects are decreased trust and injustice perceptions. When employees lose faith in their leaders, they disengage from work and reduce discretionary effort (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Perceptions of injustice, such as favoritism or arbitrary punishment, disenfranchise employees further from organizational values (Colquitt et al., 2001). Emotional exhaustion is also critical; routine psychological abuse brings about burnout, often affecting higher-order professionals who deal with high-stakes responsibilities (Aryee et al., 2008). While its effects are seen, abusive supervision is largely unchecked, especially in results-oriented or autocratic cultures that support outcomes over ethics. Organizational complicity in this behavior increases attrition risk (Tepper et al., 2011). It can only be corrected by system-change: strong reporting processes, leadership accountability, and an organizational culture based on respect and fairness.

Research Gaps

To really fully understand the value of this research in the body of literature, it has to be demonstrated that negative workplace energy at senior levels has peculiar dynamics that are not covered by existing bodies of theory. A comprehensive review of the literature, both theoretical and empirical, has revealed four primary gaps:

Predominant Focus on Frontline and Mid-Level Employees

Most empirical studies of turnover examine non-executive jobs, commonly frontline workers and middle managers. While these studies report valuable information regarding typical patterns in dissatisfaction and withdrawal, they miss the unique organizational danger and experiential settings facing senior personnel. Executives, by virtue of their role, make high-risk decisions, formulate strategy, and steward organizations. They represent organizational memory and serve as cultural role model. But their experiences, such as contact with adverse energy, are seldom reflected in big surveys. Furthermore, when senior personnel depart organizations, it is usually claimed that they are "pursuing other opportunities" or "making strategic shifts." This concealment of actual causality masks organizational diagnoses and permits senior-level toxicity to remain unremedied. By removing executives from empirical turnover theories, particularly those linked with toxic settings, we lose a critical layer of organizational susceptibility.

Mixed Methods Research Insufficiency at Executive Level

Whereas quantitative survey data facilitates measurement and correlation of turnover intentions, it leaves much to interpretation of underlying dynamics. Qualitative research



captures nuance and lived experience but falls short in generalizability. None of the studies marry both methods, particularly in cases spanning senior or executive personnel, and hence fail to provide a complete picture (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Mixed-methods research in general employee samples has shed light on the affective and contextual nature of toxic leadership and culture, but executive levels are still in need of more research. Existing research is typically single-method in design, omitting either the richness of narrative or the diversity of statistical validation. A comprehension of how negative energy impacts senior personnel requires breadth and depth, sequential mixed-methods involving first the quantification of associations with turnover and then explorations of causality and context through interviewing.

Executive-Level Incomplete Theoretical Integration

The JD-R model, Social Exchange Theory (SET), and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory have each been applied to explain aspects of employee turnover, but rarely in combined models, especially when examining negative energy in executives. JD-R emphasizes stress in the form of depleted job resources; SET identifies reciprocity and fairness in organizational exchanges; Herzberg establishes dissatisfiers, or "hygiene factors." Together, these theories may capture the multifaceted nature of negative energy experiences: as job demands (JD-R), social contract violation (SET), and hygiene deficit (Herzberg). However, studies have a tendency to test each model separately. This step-by-step examination ignores the interplay, for instance, how bad leadership leads to resource exhaustion, broken promises, and dissatisfaction simultaneously. Also, how each mechanism contributes cumulatively to senior staff's turnover decision is not well understood.

Limited Pathways to Practical Organizational Interventions

Academic research on turnover has a tendency to stop at diagnosis and offer nostrums like "improve leadership" that fail to convey the subtle difficulties confronted by senior executives. Executive roles come with high exposure, political dynamics, and reputational risks that make normal leadership development or wellness programs insufficient. To address executive turnover due to toxic leadership and culture, one requires targeted, structured interventions. These include executive coaching to improve emotional intelligence, systemic cultural audits to reveal toxic norms, and peer mediation systems to resolve interpersonal conflict. Tailored recognition systems that acknowledge the symbolic weight of executive roles and governance-level accountability mechanisms like ombuds offices or external advisory boards are similarly important. Despite growing research interest, most models have constrained applicability to executive contexts. Interventions would need to be designed to handle power relationships and organizational politics sensitively. Without targeted interventions, senior-level attrition would not come down, or the organization would not witness real organizational change.

Expected Contributions of This Study

This study stands to make several important contributions to management research and practice. By addressing the critical gaps in turnover research, particularly at the executive level, the study moves the organizational behavior, leadership, and human resource management fields ahead. These contributions can be classified into four general types: empirical connection, theoretical synthesis, practical utility, and strategic significance.



Empirical Evidence Linking Negative Energy to Executive Turnover

One of the key contributions of this study is that it offers sound empirical evidence for the relationship between negative workplace energy, e.g., toxic leadership, interpersonal aggression, and indifference—to executive turnover intentions. Contrary to much of the literature that is focused on junior or mid-tier employees, this study targets high-level professionals whose leavers threaten strategic continuity, institutional knowledge, and governance stability. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) theory, Social Exchange Theory (SET), and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, this research applies these well-developed models to a rather neglected population. Executives face unique psychological and political challenges that significantly differ from those for lower-level employees. For example, while JD–R theory hypothesizes that emotional exhaustion and professional loneliness result from high job demands in the absence of resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), this study attempts to test that variable in the setting of high-level occupations where professional loneliness and emotional exhaustion are more pronounced. The mixed-method design; 150 quantitative surveys and 20 qualitative interviews; offer depth and breadth. This methodological approach yields the highest internal validity and a robust, multi-dimensional understanding of the impact of negative energy on senior-level turnover. This research not only responds to a critical gap in turnover research but also lays a solid foundation for future studies across different industries and geographies.

Exploring Mediating Mechanisms through Multiple Theories

Another significant contribution is in the exploration of intervening psychological mechanisms bridging negative workplace energy and executive turnover intentions. Emotional exhaustion, perceived organizational injustice, and violations of the psychological contract are all theory-building but under-explored in senior leadership (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). By looking at these mediators, the study offers a more subtle explanatory model of how poisonous environments impact not just satisfaction levels, but cognitive and affective processes that ultimately lead to turnover. For example, executives may suffer extended mismatches between organizational values or successive micro-political sabotage, eventually leading to a breakdown in their psychological contract with the organization. These subtle patterns are untransparent to surface-level surveys, so the inclusion of qualitative data is, all the more, rich. Notably, this current research establishes links among theoretical models, illustrating, for instance, how negative energy functions as a job demand (JD–R), a relational cost (SET), and a lack of hygiene (Herzberg). Such theory triangulation results in organizational malfunction understanding that is wider and more flexible, and facilitates model building that will be applicable across sectors and organizational hierarchies. Such integrative theory is not typical in current scholarship and offers a model for future research aspiring to integrate fragmented paradigms of organizational behavior.

Development of Practical Intervention Models

Apart from academic results, this research aims at providing practical, actionable recommendations on how to improve executive retention. Relying on empirical data, it presumes a certain group of interventions aimed at helping organizations counter toxic dynamics and produce a more robust, supportive leadership culture. Among the most important of these proposals are executive coaching programs that emphasize emotional intelligence, ethical dilemmas, and managing conflict. These are essential to helping leaders navigate



complex interpersonal and organizational challenges. Reward systems that specifically acknowledge the symbolic and strategic efforts of top employees, reality-checking the premise that generic awards necessarily meet the needs of executive professionals, are also suggested by the study. The research also recommends the use of culture audits and climate surveys to proactively diagnose places of toxicity before they turn into attrition. Special conflict-resolution processes are advised for addressing power and interpersonal conflicts at the leadership level. Furthermore, peer feedback systems can minimize executive isolation and foster horizontal accountability among senior teams. These recommendations draw on executives' real-world experience and are generalizable across a broad range of organizational contexts. They are most importantly also generalizable beyond this type of advice in that they are role-specific, evidence-based, and can be employed to influence leadership development, succession, and governance change. They thus also have applied relevance for HR leaders, consultants, and policymakers.

Contribution to Strategic Retention and Institutional Stability

Lastly, this study contributes to the body of literature by connecting specifically senior personnel turnover to total organizational consequences, such as strategic derailment, operational discontinuity, and institutional memory loss. Executives' departures are not isolated incidents; they have cascading effects that affect team morale, stakeholders' confidence, and organizational learning. Through the revelation of the strategic consequences of unchecked negative energy, the research helps to reframe executive turnover as a issue both of governance and human resources. This perspective leaves space for a paradigm shift: from an orientation towards "people problem" conceptualization of toxic leadership to one that views it as a systemic threat to organizational resilience and competitive advantage. It also makes explicit the necessity to safeguard high-level talent, not only as an issue of retention, but as an investment in the long-term sustainability of the organization. In addition, the study emphasizes the role of leading professionals as carriers of culture, individuals whose behavior sets the standards for others and whose presence tends to stabilize teams and policies. Maintaining such a cadre from burnout, alienation, or disengagement is therefore essential to maintaining strategic momentum and adaptive capacity in complex environments.

Alignment with Real-World Contexts

The burgeoning rate of executive turnover, often ignited by poisonous workplace cultures, only emphasizes the urgent relevance of this research to organizational matters today. From industries and global contexts, greater numbers reveal how poisonous energy at upper leadership levels, manifested as toxic culture, interpersonal hostility, or governance failure, affects not only executive retention but also threatens overall institutional stability and strategic consolidation. These tangible examples provide practical application to the theoretical problems discussed in this research. A good example is the case of Hobsons Bay Council in Australia where toxic leadership traits like bullying, micromanaging, and harassment created a hostile work culture to the extent of prompting an official investigation by WorkSafe Victoria. The subsequent resignation of the Chief Executive Officer was a demonstration of how unchecked toxicity at the top seeps throughout an organization, consuming morale, destroying public faith, and drawing regulatory notice (Herald Sun, 2023). This is a classic example of systemic failure at the leadership level and the need for early detection and intervention at the executive level. Large-scale studies affirm the same. It was observed in a 2024 survey by Businessolver that more than 50% of CEOs confessed their workplace cultures were toxic, with



most attributing these cultures to mental health decline and executive turnover. More interestingly, the survey found toxic culture to be as much as 10 times more predictive of turnover than pay raises (Business Insider, 2024). This denies the widely held view that executive exits are primarily cash-led and instead emphasizes the critical role of psychosocial states of work. Similarly, in 2023, the MIT Sloan Management Review published a high-level employee sentiment study, determining toxic culture was 10.4 times more indicative of turnover than pay. The study linked toxic cultures with adverse employee attitudes, disaffection with management, and declining trust in organizational values—issues especially relevant to executives responsible for living and upholding these values. In combination, these cases are used to affirm the primary contention of this study: toxic energy in the form of poor leadership, fractured peer relationships, and unexpressed hostility is a persuasive force behind executive turnover. Implications are loss of institutional memory, disruption of strategic projects, and reputational harm. By connecting empirical observation with documented organizational failure, this research provides not only theoretical insight but also practical tools for the building of leadership, HR professionals, and policymakers who wish to battle executive-level turnover through culture change and special interventions

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the relationship between low workplace energy and high-level employee turnover. This approach was chosen for its potential to pair the breadth of quantitative data with the contextual richness of qualitative data, appropriate to investigate complex, multi-faceted organizational phenomena in which psychological and structural forces intersect (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The research began with a quantitative phase in which 150 senior-level employees from public, private, and nonprofit organizations were given a sample structured questionnaire. These organizations had experienced executive turnover during the past 12 months to offer context validity. Stratified purposive sampling ensured variation in sectors and leadership levels. The tested measures, toxic leadership, interpersonal hostility, and non-recognition adapted scales, were used to measure negative energy; the Job Satisfaction Survey (Spector, 1997); and the TIS-6 Turnover Intention Scale (Bothma & Roodt, 2013). Online Likert responses were obtained. Cronbach's alpha and exploratory factor analysis were conducted to establish reliability and construct validity. Following this, qualitative phase included 20 semi-structured interviews of executives having experienced or observed toxic workplace behavior. Maximum variation sampling was utilized to ascertain diversity in sector, gender, and leadership experience. Interviews varied from toxic behavior, leadership dysfunction, emotional exhaustion, and turnover choices. Open-ended questions ensured rich personal narratives. Interviews were audio-recorded (with permission), transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. This laid the foundation for inductive coding and recognition of repetition themes relating to negative energy and attrition at senior level. Quantitative data were managed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics documented participant profiles and key variables. Correlation analysis established relationships between negative energy, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions, and multiple regression analysis established the predictive power of negative energy for turnover, controlling for age, tenure, and organizational type. The ethical standards were an important part of the research. Institutional review board approval was received, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Pseudonymization ensured anonymity and confidentiality, and participants were allowed to withdraw at any time without penalty. By



integrating quantitative generalizability with richness of qualitative results, this study offered a general description of the manner in which toxic organizational dynamics shape executive turnover. Mixed-methodology increased validity in findings and allowed a robust basis for practical recommendations to support executive retention through structural and cultural interventions.

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of both the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews, and provides a detailed analysis of the role of negative energy in high-level staff turnover. The results are presented thematically and are supported by statistical tables and participants' direct quotations. The quantitative stage consisted of data from 150 executive-level staff, while the qualitative data were derived from 20 detailed interviews. Together, these findings offer a multi-faceted understanding of the dynamics of perceived negative workplace energy, job satisfaction, and turnover intention at the executive level.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the three primary variables under investigation: perceived negative energy, job satisfaction, and turnover intention.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Perceived Negative Energy	3.87	0.94	1.00	5.00
Job Satisfaction	2.45	0.76	1.00	5.00
Turnover Intention	4.12	0.89	1.00	5.00

The study's descriptive results show that perceived negative energy at work was relatively high for senior-level respondents ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.94$), suggesting frequent instances of toxic dynamics like poor leadership, lack of recognition, and conflict among individuals. These findings are consistent with studies acknowledging toxic behaviors as salient organizational stressors, which frequently result in emotional strain and disengagement (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002; Weberg et al., 2019). Importantly, the elevated levels of toxicity are consistent with literature highlighting the particularly damaging impact of adverse psychological climates on executives, who are among others accountable for long-term strategic decision-making (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Job satisfaction, on the other hand, was especially low ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.76$), lending credence to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory that the absence of lower-order hygiene factors; such as respectful leadership and appreciation, leads to dissatisfaction rather than engagement (Herzberg, 1968; Kvale, 1996). This also finds affinity with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), where employees begin to withdraw when workplace "costs" outweigh perceived rewards. The findings also manifested high turnover intentions ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.89$), echoing trends in existing literature connecting toxic cultures with higher attrition, especially at leadership levels (Hancock et al., 2013; Akca, 2017). To corroborate this, the MIT Sloan Management Review (2022) quoted that toxic culture is over 10 times more likely to predict attrition than pay. Collectively, these findings affirm the theoretical underpinnings of

the JD-R model, Social Exchange Theory, and Herzberg's model, with a need for additional deeper exploration.

Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the strength and direction of the relationships among the three key variables: perceived negative energy, job satisfaction, and turnover intention. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3
1. Perceived Negative Energy	1.000	-0.652	0.721
2. Job Satisfaction	-0.652	1.000	-0.689
3. Turnover Intention	0.721**	-0.689**	1.000

*Note: * $p < 0.01$ (significant at the 1% level)

The results indicated statistically significant associations among the three main variables: perceived negative energy, job satisfaction, and turnover intention. Perceived negative energy was positively and significantly correlated with turnover intention ($r = 0.721$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that executives who experienced toxic workplace dynamics, foul mood at work, poor leadership, or being ostracized—were likely to contemplate leaving their organizations. These finding echoes earlier research by Duffy et al. (2002), which identified how adverse climates accelerate withdrawal behaviors, particularly in high-responsibility work. Negative energy was also negatively correlated with job satisfaction ($r = -0.652$, $p < 0.01$), supporting the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In accordance with this model, emotionally demanding situations deplete internal resources, reduce satisfaction, and increase the risk of burnout. For managers, long-term exposure to toxic dynamics wears down their psychological resilience and overall commitment. Job satisfaction, however, was inversely correlated with turnover intention ($r = -0.689$, $p < 0.01$). This negative relationship is thoroughly documented in turnover literature (Hom et al., 2017; Hancock et al., 2013). Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) offers further insight, executives perceiving a psychological contract violation on dimensions like inadequate recognition or moral inconsistency tend to quit. These inter-correlated findings suggest a cyclical model: toxic energy decreases satisfaction, which in turn increases attrition risk. They also accord with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1968), which classifies toxic energy as a hygiene deficit that erodes satisfaction without any motivational benefit. Overall, the correlation analysis provides rigorous empirical backing for theoretical models employed by this study.

Regression Analysis

To assess the predictive strength of perceived negative energy and job satisfaction on turnover intention among senior staff, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The model tested whether these variables, taken together, could significantly explain variance in the likelihood of employees considering leaving their organizations.

Table 3: Regression Analysis for Turnover Intention

Predictor	β	Std. Error	t	p-value
Perceived Negative Energy	0.615	0.042	8.21	<0.001
Job Satisfaction	-0.498	0.039	-7.35	<0.001

Model Summary

R² 0.64 Adjusted R²

Regression analysis indicated that the model accounted for 64% of variance in turnover intention ($R^2 = 0.64$), which indicated the presence of a strong and statistically significant fit of the model. Perceived negative energy was a robust positive predictor of turnover intention ($\beta = 0.615$, $p < 0.001$), and it demonstrated how senior-level employees who labored in poisonous work environments with inefficient leadership, interpersonal conflict, and no appreciation were more likely to consider resigning from their firms. This agrees with previous findings that correlate emotionally exhausting work environments with greater attrition among professionals holding high-responsibility roles (Weberg et al., 2019; Hancock et al., 2013). Simultaneously, job satisfaction was a negative turnover intention predictor ($\beta = -0.498$, $p < 0.001$), upholding the hypothesis that declining satisfaction creates greater turnover inclinations. This validates Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1968), which identifies dissatisfaction stemming from hygiene shortcomings, like insufficient supervision and inadequate feelings of appreciation, as one of the key catalysts for disengagement and exit behavior. These regression findings also provide empirical support for the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). According to this model, as defined, when job demands such as chronic negativity outweigh available resources such as support and autonomy, burnout and turnover risk increase. The following findings attest to this dual-pressure mechanism in executive settings. Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) puts these findings into perspective further by speculating that executives who experience a gap between their contribution and the organizational return are likely to depart. This failure of the psychological contract is particularly devastating at senior levels, where trust, respect, and influence are high. These results are significant in view of the strategic consequences of executive exodus. As Park and Shaw (2013) highlight, leadership exit can derail large projects, undermine organizational culture, and deplete institutional knowledge. Regression results, on the other hand, highlight the imperatives of managing sources of adverse energy and support environments for leadership groups proactively. In summary, this analysis confirms that both job dissatisfaction and perceived toxicity are strong predictors of turnover intention for executives. These findings underscore the urgent need for organizations to create psychologically safe, inclusive, and appreciative leadership cultures to retain premier talent and ensure organizational continuity.

Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Interviews

Thematic analysis of the 20 semi-structured interviews revealed three dominant sources of negative energy that were repeatedly linked to intentions to leave: poor leadership, lack of recognition, and interpersonal conflict.

Table 4: Thematic Analysis of Negative Energy Factors

Theme	Frequency (n = 20)	Quote
Poor Leadership	15	Managers ignore employee concerns, making us feel undervalued
Lack of Recognition	12	There's no appreciation for hard work, leading to frustration.
Interpersonal Conflict	10	Toxic workplace relationships make it unbearable to stay.

Poor leadership was the most frequent source of negative energy reported, with the majority of participants giving examples of micromanaging, emotional unavailability, or dictatorial decision-making styles. Non-acknowledgment was also frequent, particularly where executive input was taken for granted or where upward feedback was not appreciated. Interpersonal conflict between senior staff members and constant miscommunication also made a powerful contribution to feelings of emotional exhaustion and disengagement. These qualitative results were very congruent with the quantitative. The participants who described their workplaces as toxic or unsupportive also reported lower job satisfaction and higher quit intentions. In addition, a number of participants framed quitting not simply as a result of isolated incidents, but instead as a culmination of cumulative negative experiences that undermined their professional identity, motivation, and belonging. Combined, both strands of data confirmed that adverse energy—grounded in leadership behavior, recognition practices, and interpersonal dynamics—was a prime mover of senior staff turnover. The results emphasized the need for severe, targeted intervention to improve executive retention through organizational culture transformation, leadership development, and the creation of positive psychological climates.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide rigorous support that negative work energy is a robust predictor of turnover intention among senior employees, complementing and enhancing key assumptions of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964). Both the regression and correlation tests determined statistically significant and positive correlations between turnover intention and perceived negative energy, which indicate that the more toxic relations senior employees perceive in terms of such traits as poor leadership, neglect, and interpersonal conflicts, the greater the likelihood that they detach and consider organizational exit. One of the present contributions of the research is highlighting senior-level staff, a group that has been somewhat disregarded in existing turnover research, which has to a very large degree centered on frontline or mid-level employees (Park & Shaw, 2013; Akca, 2017). Senior staff possess specific strategic responsibilities and institutional memory, making their turnover not just costly but disruptive to long-term goals and continuity in leadership. The regression test confirmed that perceived negative energy continued to be a good predictor of turnover after job satisfaction was controlled for, noting that toxicity in culture and leadership directly and independently impact attrition at the executive level.

The qualitative interviews throughout the study supplemented these quantitative findings further, giving firsthand testimony on how negative energy functions in upper management.



They uniformly described environments where leadership ignored concerns, efforts were not valued, and conflict between individuals was not managed. These experiential examples provide empirical validation for conceptualizing negative energy as an intricate organizational toxin—one that not just harms job satisfaction but psychological safety and professional regard. Perhaps one of the shrewdest findings of the study was the intervening role of job satisfaction. The results showed a very high negative correlation between job satisfaction and turnover intention, affirming Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1968) because it differentiates between motivators and hygiene factors. Negative energy is a source of dissatisfaction (a hygiene deficiency), but once satisfaction is present, it can act as a prevention against the behavioral outcomes of toxicity. Here, even in the presence of negative dynamics, those with higher intrinsic or extrinsic satisfaction can exhibit higher resilience or organizational commitment. This is consistent with the notion that job satisfaction is a moderating variable, with protective value in otherwise challenging circumstances (Judge et al., 2001).

The findings have important implications for executive leadership development and human resource management. Interventions focused on merely dealing with compensation or cosmetic engagement initiatives can encourage shortages if root causes of negative energy such as poisonous leadership and organizational unfairness are not dealt with. To that end, the research suggests leadership coaching initiatives, formal appreciation systems, formal conflict resolution processes, and culture audits as components of an evidence-informed framework to detect and eliminate sources of toxicity prior to their transition to attrition. These practical recommendations further expand the scholarly contribution of the study by allowing a model of executive-level turnover reduction at the field level. This research is also important alongside recent real-world events where toxic workplace culture at the executive level has precipitated high-profile exits and media coverage. Cases such as Hobsons Bay Council, Australia, and a study by the MIT Sloan Management Review indicate how toxic culture, not compensation, is the primary cause of departure in diverse industries (SloanReview.mit.edu, 2024). These external findings align with the study's results, confirming that psychosocial work environment, not compensation, is often the deciding factor behind executive quitting.

All in all, this study adds to the body of literature through an empirical verification of the relevance of negative energy to high-level employee turnover, combining several theoretical frameworks (JD-R, SET, and Herzberg) and offering a mixed-method analysis that identifies statistical patterns while also keeping human experience in sight. It underlines the pressing mandate that organizations overcome superficial retention practices and address the fundamental organizational and leadership factors that generate corrosive workplace cultures. By establishing a positive, respectful, and inclusive workplace culture, organizations can shield not just their executive stars but also their long-term strategic performance as well as institutional reputation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined negative energy as a measurable and important cause of high-level employee turnover and demonstrated through both quantitative and qualitative evidence its corrosive effects on job satisfaction and retention. It was found that dysfunctional workplace conditions—ineffective leadership, interpersonal tension, and lack of appreciation—have direct effects on emotional exhaustion, dissatisfaction, and heightened turnover intentions



among senior employees. These findings also affirm theoretical frameworks such as the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model, Social Exchange Theory, and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, but extrapolate them to an executive-level workforce. The implication is clear: negative energy is not only a cultural flaw, but a strategic threat. In high-risk environments where senior staff are crucial to organizational memory, governance, and innovation, accepting toxic behavior can cause long-term instability, disengagement, and decreased performance. Organizations must therefore accept the fact that negative energy is a top retention issue—something that requires intentional leadership and systemic response.

In order to fight this problem, the study offers some evidence-based suggestions:

Improve Leader Development: Companies must implement formal leadership development programs emphasizing emotional intelligence, inclusive communication, ethical leadership, and conflict resolution. These programs must address directly the behaviors that create toxic energy and equip leaders with the skills to develop psychologically safe and supportive cultures. Training needs to sensitize leaders to the downstream effects of their behavior on morale, performance, and turnover. **Implement Strategic Recognition Programs:** Absence of recognition runs as a thread through this study and other research on workplace dissatisfaction. Formal and informal recognition schemes should be integrated into organizational procedures in an effort to regularly celebrate achievements, motivate engagement, and etch a culture of gratitude. Tailored tactics of recognition for star performers can be potent, and therefore effective, mechanisms for retaining them.

Establish Resilient Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: Unresolved interpersonal tensions are a major cause of negative energy. Firms must establish easy access and confidential conflict resolution mechanisms that invite employees to raise issues with immunity from retaliation. **Mediation procedures, ombudsperson roles, and anonymous reporting systems can help resolve workplace tensions and reduce the emotional toll on employees.** **Foster a Positive Culture at Work:** Culture is the invisible force that ignites or disperses poisonous leadership. Businesses must work actively to build an inclusive, respectful, and purposeful culture. This entails defining behavioral norms, modeling civility at the top levels, conducting culture surveys, and encouraging cooperative behavior. Positive culture isn't just needed for retention; it's also needed for innovation and performance.

Invest in Further Research and Monitoring: With the newness of executive-level turnover for reasons of workplace toxicity, further research is warranted. Longitudinal studies might track the impact of interventions over time, with sector-specific research perhaps being able to yield insights into unique dynamics in various industries. Internal metrics (e.g., exit interviews, engagement surveys) also need to be tracked by organizations in order to identify early warning signs of increased negative energy. In short, negative energy is inevitable, it is essential to long-term employee retention and organizational success. Focusing on leadership excellence, commendation, dispute resolution, and cultural health enables organizations to prevent turnover risk and enhance commitment among their most strategically important employees. Proactive organizations will be better positioned to build robust institutions that are able to withstand change and provide sustained progress.



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