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# The relation between goal orientation and occupational withdrawal

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to test the relation between employee goal orientation and occupational withdrawal intentions and behaviors considering employee satisfaction a mediator in the relations.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Survey data were obtained from a sample of 241 licensed real estate professionals using a self-administrated questionnaire. Mediation hypotheses were tested using Smart PLS.

**Findings** – The results indicate that job satisfaction fully mediates the relation between learning goal orientation and occupational withdrawal intentions and behaviors. A direct positive relation was found between avoid goal orientation and occupational withdrawal intentions and behaviors.

**Practical implications** – Worker shortages in many occupations increases the importance of the ability to understand and predict occupational withdrawal behaviors.

**Originality/value** – This study adds to the literature by considering goal orientation as an individual employee characteristics central in predicting and understanding occupational attitudes and withdrawal intentions and behaviors.

**Keywords** Employee attitudes, Mediation, Goal orientation, Occupational withdrawal

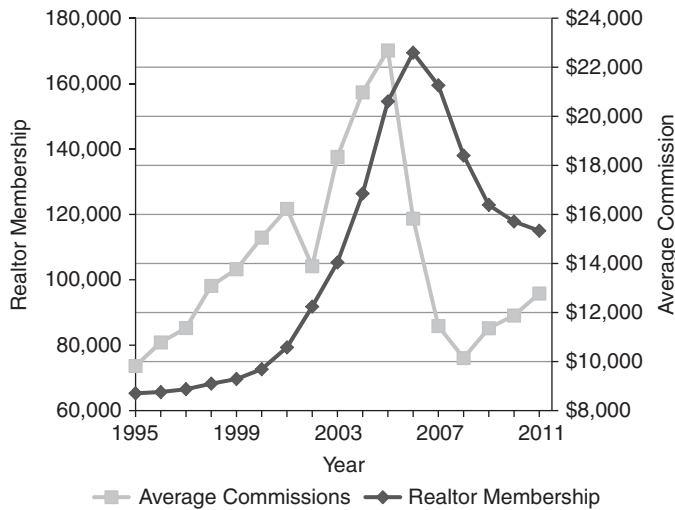
**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Holland's (1996) career typology postulates that individuals with a poor fit between their personal characteristics and their vocation are less likely to be satisfied with their positions, have increased thoughts of changing vocations, and experience an unstable career path with shifts between differing vocations. This study considers the personal characteristic of goal orientation. The goal orientation adopted by an individual establishes their mental framework which is used in decision making (Silver *et al.*, 2006). Depending upon the goal orientation of the individual, he/she is likely to respond differently to changes in the workplace. For example, an individual high on learning goal orientation is likely to face challenges with a decision to exert additional effort or to try a new strategy. This differs from an individual with a high avoid goal orientation, who is likely to decide to give up or give in when faced with extreme work changes. "Goal orientation is a promising motivational construct that may explain why some individuals adapt to change better" (DeShon and Gillespie, 2005, p. 1096).

With many US industries facing recessionary pressures, employee ability to respond positively to change may aid the organization successfully withstand difficult times. One such industry is that of the residential real estate market. The state of Florida, USA is one of the hardest hit markets (Sauter *et al.*, 2012). The US housing market, during the boom years of 2002-2006, attracted increased numbers of individuals to the real estate profession. As displayed in Figure 1, the years following the housing market bust saw a decrease in the number of Florida Realtors. The trend in employment matches the trend





**Note:** <sup>a</sup>Calculated as (number of single family homes sold in the state of Florida  $\times$  median sales price  $\times$  6 percent commission) divided by membership figures for Florida Realtors

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**Figure 1.**  
Florida data  
1995-2011: Realtor  
membership and  
average agent sales  
commission for  
single family  
home sales<sup>a</sup>

in home sales and Florida average per agent commission figures for single family home sales (Martin, 2012; also displayed in Figure 1). While these figures are not a complete measure of average commissions earned, since they do not include multiple family units (condominiums) or retail units, they do provide a snapshot of the steep rise and fall of commissions during the boom and bust time periods. It is suggested that the housing bubble and bust presented an extreme example of workplace change. Thus, as the job of a Realtor became more challenging, the match between individual and job is likely to have changed. During the boom years, individuals less able to cope with challenge may have nevertheless achieved financial success as a Realtor. During difficult years, those same individuals may have lacked the skills or personal characteristics needed to continue to achieve the same level of financial success. It is proposed that the difference between those individuals who elect to leave the occupation vs those who remain may be a function of goal orientation. As such, this study adds to the literature on occupational attitudes and withdrawal by considering goal orientation as an individual employee characteristics central in predicting and understanding occupational attitudes and withdrawal intentions.

### Theoretical model

A theoretical model of job withdrawal has been proposed by Hulin and expanded by his colleagues and former students over the years (see also Brett and Drasgow, 2002). In part, this model proposes that worker characteristics are antecedents of withdrawal behavior and this relation is mediated by employee job attitudes. Holland's model also suggests that the relation between personal characteristics and career withdrawal thoughts and behaviors is mediated by satisfaction. While many worker characteristics have been studied in relation to employee job attitudes and withdrawal behavior, goal orientation has not yet been fully considered in this context. Theory does suggest, however, that goal orientation may be a good predictor of job attitudes (Fortunato and

Goldblatt, 2006). The theoretical model tested in this study is presented in Figure 2. A discussion of the constructs and the proposed model follows. Income is a common control variable in withdrawal research (Blau, 2007), as such, a measure of income was included in the model.

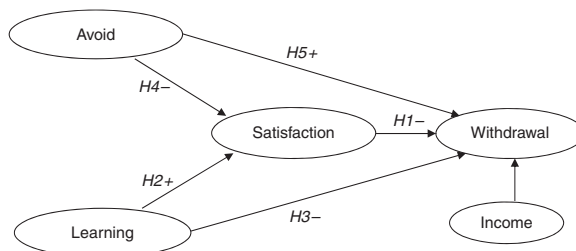
*Withdrawal*

Withdrawal encompasses the behaviors which distance employees from unfavorable work situations (Hulin, 1990). Withdrawal is a widely studied construct and research has tied turnover and intention to turnover with dozens of work and employee-related variables (see Cotton and Tuttle, 1986; Griffeth *et al.*, 2000). Early views of employee withdrawal focussed almost entirely on turnover and the more readily measured, intention to turnover (see Steel and Ovalle, 1984). Yet the turnover process may begin much earlier for employees. Mobley (1977) and Mobley *et al.* (1978) suggested a more heuristic model of turnover that includes the thought processes, review of alternative job markets, and analysis of the costs associated with leaving a job prior to forming an intention to quit. In testing a similar proposition, Cheung (2004) found that many nurses reported thinking about leaving their professions for months or years and often began to prepare themselves for different occupations through alternative education and schedule changes before formally resigning. It is with this heuristic model in mind that withdrawal is operationalized in this study to include both withdrawal attitude and withdrawal behavior.

*Job satisfaction*

Job satisfaction is broadly defined as the positive or negative feelings people have toward their jobs (Ghazzawi, 2008) and has “long been viewed as a general indicator of employee attitudes about work” (Rubin and Brody, 2011, p. 468). In addition, it is also one of the primary job attitudes studied in respect to turnover, withdrawal intentions, and withdrawal behavior (see Locke, 1976). Research findings have consistently found a negative relation between satisfaction and a wide group of withdrawal thoughts and behaviors (Ghazzawi, 2008; Griffeth *et al.*, 2000; Hulin, 1990; Scott and Taylor, 1985; Seashore and Taber, 1975). For example, Donohue (2007) found that job satisfaction was the strongest predictor of occupational persistence. Likewise, Harrison *et al.* (2006) found support for the proposal that overall job attitudes were significant predictors of a general theme of job and work withdrawal thoughts and behaviors. Research findings generally support the notion that dissatisfied employees and employees with negative feelings toward their positions are more likely to engage in thoughts and behaviors that fit within a general class of withdrawal attitudes and behaviors. This leads to the first hypothesis:

- H1. Job satisfaction is negatively related to occupational withdrawal (a) attitude and (b) behavior.



**Figure 2.**  
Hypothesized model

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### Goal orientation

Goal orientation theory suggests that individuals are motivated to think and behave in certain ways depending upon their views toward learning. VandeWalle (1997) describes three components of goal orientation: learning, avoid, and prove. Learning orientation is demonstrated by a desire to develop competency by acquiring new skills and learning from experience. When faced with difficult tasks or negative outcomes, employees with a strong learning orientation adjust their strategies to ensure continued success (Bell and Kozlowski, 2002; Colquitt and Simmering, 1998). The high learning-oriented individual is eager for challenges and willing to take on exceedingly more difficult tasks (VandeWalle, 1997) with a focus on effort as a way to overcome obstacles (Creed *et al.*, 2009). Research suggests that high learning-oriented individuals express greater motivation with difficult tasks (Horvath *et al.*, 2006) and believe that continued effort and hard work will lead to continued success (Lin and Chang, 2005). Research also suggests that employees with a strong learning orientation express greater organizational commitment (Lee *et al.*, 2010) and are more likely to be satisfied with jobs that offer a challenge (Janssen and VanYperen, 2004; Van Yperen and Janssen, 2002). This persistence in the face of challenge has been tied to increased performance for college students (Button *et al.*, 1996) and increases in job satisfaction for employees (Janssen and VanYperen, 2004; Lai *et al.*, 2011). Yet Harris *et al.* (2005) did not find a significant path between learning orientation and a single-item measure of job satisfaction. It may be that a single item measure of satisfaction was not sufficiently sensitive to differing levels of employee satisfaction or that the jobs under study were not considered challenging by the respondents. With these mixed results in the literature, continued study of the relation between learning orientation and job satisfaction is needed. Given the challenges facing the real estate professional in the years following the 2006 market crash discussed in the introduction and that theory and research findings discussed above suggest that individuals with a learning goal orientation express greater satisfaction when faced with a challenging task, a positive relation between learning orientation and job satisfaction is proposed:

*H2.* Learning orientation is positively related to job satisfaction.

Wang and Takeuchi (2007) found a negative relation between expatriate learning goal orientation and intentions to return from their overseas assignment prematurely. Thus, a strong learning orientation was related to increased intentions to remain in their assignments. This finding differs from the findings of Dysvik and Kuvaas (2010) and Lin and Chang (2005). In both of these studies, the findings indicated that a strong learning orientation was related to increased turnover or intentions to turnover. The differences in the level of challenge offered in the job may explain the differences in the findings. In Wang and Takeuchi's sample, an expatriate assignment could be considered quite challenging since employees are faced with many new experiences. However, in the Lin and Chang and Dysvik and Kuvaas studies, the respondents held primarily non-management level positions which may offer fewer challenges. Employees "may want to quit if the organization fails to provide them with an opportunity to be promoted or are unable to constantly challenge them with new inspiring tasks for them to learn" (Lin and Chang, 2005, p. 344). With these mixed results in the literature, continued study of the relation between learning orientation and withdrawal intentions is needed. Given the challenges facing the real estate professional in the years following the 2006 market bust discussed in the introduction and theory and research discussed above which suggests that individuals with a low learning goal orientation are more

likely to express increased withdrawal intentions when faced with a challenging task, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H3.* Learning orientation is negatively related to withdrawal (a) attitude and (b) behavior.

Avoid orientation and prove orientation are two aspects of a more general performance goal orientation (i.e. performance-avoidance and performance-approach). Performance-avoidance, referred to as avoid orientation, is a desire to avoid disapproval which may be forthcoming because of a show of low ability (VandeWalle, 1997). Those individuals scoring high on the avoid goal orientation dimension are likely to avoid tasks that have the potential to demonstrate poor performance. Instead of trying with a risk of failing, high avoid goal orientation individuals would rather not try at all (Bell and Kozlowski, 2002). This differs from a performance-approach goal orientation (referred to as prove orientation) which is demonstrated by a desire to appear capable and have others consider them competent. Employees with a strong prove goal orientation consider feedback a form of evaluation and are more likely to select tasks in which they appear to succeed in order to gain favorable feedback from others (VandeWalle, 1997). Unlike those employed in a typical organizational hierarchy, respondents under study are more likely to be independent contractors or self-employed. With few or no formal methods of supervisor feedback, the prove goal orientation dimension may be a less effective predictor of attitudes and intentions for this respondent group. Thus, hypotheses are limited to avoid goal orientation.

Theoretically, the relation between performance orientation and job satisfaction should differ depending upon the difficulty of the job tasks. Theory suggests that performance goal-oriented individuals would be more satisfied with jobs that offer fewer challenges and less satisfied with jobs with greater challenges. Since it is easier to achieve goals if they are not set too high, performance-oriented individuals are more likely to be satisfied with jobs that have fewer challenges. Likewise, the performance-oriented individual is likely to be dissatisfied with jobs that have goals that are too high and are too difficult to achieve. Research utilizing primarily male Korean managers conducted by Joo and Park (2010) support this linkage. Their findings indicate that employees with a strong performance orientation were more satisfied with jobs that required little additional effort (see also Joo and Ready, 2012). During boom years in the residential real estate market, homes practically sell themselves with buyers competing for the opportunity to purchase anything offered for sale. The real estate professional is likely to find that the job of selling is much easier, with few challenges. Thus, theory suggests that during boom years, the relation between performance orientation and job satisfaction is positive. Yet during a difficult real estate market, real estate professionals are likely to find that their jobs do require additional effort. Finding qualified buyers for the over stock of homes for sale may be very challenging and the individual with a high-performance goal orientation is likely to find the job of a real estate professional quite different from that experienced during boom years. With no easy sales available, the high-performance goal-orientated individual is more likely to be dissatisfied with a job in real estate. Given that the sampling for this study was collected during difficult times in the residential real estate market, we propose a negative relation between performance goal orientation (as measured by avoid goal orientation) and job satisfaction:

- H4.* Avoid goal orientation is negatively related to job satisfaction.

McFarland and Kidwell (2006) theorize that high avoid orientation sales personnel are incapable of setting appropriate selling strategies or setting high sales goals for themselves

and thus are unlikely to perform well in a sales job. In addition, employees with a strong performance goal orientation are more likely to quit a job that repeatedly challenges their abilities as they fear they will be unable to appear successful (Lin and Chang, 2005). In support of this theoretical argument are Wang and Takeuchi (2007) who found a positive relation between expatriate avoid goal orientation and increased intentions to return from their overseas assignment prematurely. However, this finding was contradicted by Lin and Chang (2005) in their study of employees who may hold less challenging positions. Their findings indicate that employees with longer tenure also had stronger performance goal orientations. With these mixed results in the literature, continued study of the relation between avoid orientation and withdrawal intentions is proposed. Given that theory suggests that individuals with a high avoid goal orientation are likely to perform poorly or express desires to withdraw from challenging jobs, a positive relation between avoid orientation and withdrawal intentions is proposed:

*H5.* Avoid orientation is positively related to withdrawal (a) attitude and (b) behavior.

Kohler and Mathieu (1993) tested a model of withdrawal using a sample of 194 bus drivers. Their findings provide support for the belief that affective responses mediate the influence of worker characteristics on absence. Given these findings and Hulin's theoretical model of withdrawal, which places employee job attitudes as mediators in the relation between individual and job characteristics and withdrawal intentions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H6.* Job satisfaction mediates the relation between learning orientation and withdrawal (a) attitude and (b) behavior.

*H7.* Job satisfaction mediates the relation between avoid orientation and withdrawal (a) attitude and (b) behavior.

## Method

### *Procedures*

The target population included licensed real estate professionals in the state of Florida, USA. As is often necessary in social science research, non-probability sampling techniques were used to gather the sample. While non-probability sampling techniques are not ideal, probability sampling techniques are not always superior to non-probability techniques and do not guarantee a more representative sample (Kerlinger and Lee, 2000). To increase response rates and better represent the population under study, a number of non-probability sampling techniques were used, including: convenience, judgment, and snowball. Data were collected in two waves in the fall of 2009. In the first wave, a convenience sampling technique was utilized. A convenience sampling technique refers to obtaining participants who are readily available (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). A personal contact of the researchers volunteered to solicit respondents from her multi-branch real estate firm covering the greater geographic area of South Florida. A total of 200 real estate professionals were contacted via e-mail, asked to participate, and directed to an online survey. To increase the response rate, paper copies ( $n = 56$ ) were also distributed to three branch offices of the same organization to those who had not yet completed the online version of the survey. In total, 141 surveys were returned, for a response rate of 70 percent.

The second wave of the data collection was completed to ensure the sample included real estate professionals from the entire state of Florida. Using a judgment sampling

technique, 35 major cities within the state of Florida were identified to fully represent the entire state. In a judgment sampling technique, the researcher selects the sample based on a characteristic he/she believes will satisfy a specific purpose of the study (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). In this study, geographic representation was considered important because the real estate market, and therefore the attitudes of the real estate professionals, may differ based on geographic location. For each major city identified, a Google search for Real Estate Agent was conducted. The web pages for the first three agencies returned by the Google search process were reviewed for e-mail contact information. Agencies not listing any e-mail contact information or with all information outdated were replaced by the next agency returned by the Google search. E-mail messages were sent to each agency inviting participation in the survey, and directing the real estate professional to an online survey. In addition, the e-mail message invited respondents to forward the survey request to colleagues they thought might be willing to participate, a form of snowball sampling. Asking respondents for referrals is an effective way of increasing response rates (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010) and allows for a personal connection to the survey which otherwise was unsolicited. Surveys were returned by 112 respondents in the second wave of the study. Given the nature of the sampling techniques utilized and possible incorrect or inactive e-mail addresses, it is not possible to calculate the response rate for the second wave of the study. However, prior research suggests a low response rate is likely for unsolicited e-mail requests for survey participation (Manfreda *et al.*, 2008).

Member profile figures reported for Florida Realtors by the National Association of Realtors (Bishop and Lautz, 2009) indicate that 92 percent of Florida real estate professionals use e-mail daily or nearly every day, an indication that electronic means of contact and data collection are a good fit for the population under study. Podsakoff *et al.* (2012) suggest that method bias can be reduced by motivating respondents to provide accurate answers using a number of techniques. These include maintaining anonymity, invoking interest in the topic, noting the study's importance, and by offering respondents study results. All of these techniques were used in both waves of data collection. In addition, the directions to the survey were also generic in nature to preclude priming the respondent for an expected response (i.e.: this study gathers information about your feelings and beliefs related to your work). The electronic survey permitted only one completed survey per IP address.

### *Sample*

Respondents were licensed real estate agents or associate brokers/brokers currently employed within the state of Florida, USA. Surveys were returned by 253 respondents. In total, 12 surveys were started but not completed, leaving 241 completed surveys for data analysis, 59 percent female and 41 percent male. Respondents reported an average age of 49 years (SD = 12.0) and that they had held their license on average for ten years (SD = 7.62). Most considered real estate a full-time position (79 percent).

To determine if the sample was representative of the target population, we compared the demographic data of the sample to that of the target population (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). We utilized the 2009 member profile figures reported for Florida Realtors by the National Association of Realtors (Bishop and Lautz, 2009) as our target population demographics. Although only grouped percentages and median population figures were available for comparison, our findings suggest that the sample demographic statistics are relatively consistent with 2009 member profile figures reported for Florida Realtors by the National Association of Realtors, an indication of a representative sample (population figures: 58 percent female, median age 55, ten years median real estate experience, 80 percent full-time).



### Measures

*Goal orientation.* Goal orientation was measured by the three dimension goal orientation scale developed by VandeWalle (1997). To maintain consistency with previously cited literature, all three measures of goal orientation were presented to the respondents, although only two measures were used in hypotheses testing. Prove performance goal orientation consists of four items, learning goal orientation consists of five items, and avoid performance goal orientation consists of four items. The total 13 goal orientation items were grouped together as a whole, but the items for the three measures were randomly ordered on the survey. All items were measured on a five-point scale from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree. Higher scores are an indication of greater reported preferences for a particular goal orientation. Previous research has reported internal reliability measures of 0.85, 0.92, and 0.89, respectively (Maurer and Lippstreu, 2008). Construct validity for the three dimension scale has also been demonstrated in prior studies (McFarland and Kidwell, 2006; Porath and Bateman, 2006; VandeWalle, 1997).

*Satisfaction.* Satisfaction was measured as a four-item scale adapted from existing job satisfaction measures (Cook *et al.*, 1981). Three items were measured from 1 very dissatisfied to 5 very satisfied and the fourth from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree. Higher scores are an indication of greater satisfaction with the job characteristics and a occupation in real estate. Sample items include “I am quite satisfied with my real estate career” and “How satisfied are you with the progress you are making towards the goals which you set for yourself in your present real estate position?”

*Occupational withdrawal.* In keeping with the suggestions outlined earlier for using composite measures of withdrawal, multiple withdrawal behaviors, thoughts, and intentions have been measured. Respondents were asked five questions (see the Appendix) to measure their behavioral and psychological distance from their positions in real estate. All items were measured on a five-point scale from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree. Higher scores are an indication of greater occupational withdrawal intentions. Withdrawal attitude was measured as a three item reflective construct (disappt, enter, expand) and withdrawal behavior was measured as a two item formative construct (keep, outside).

*Income.* Income was considered a control variable and measured as a single item on a five-point scale from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree. The item presented was My primary income is derived from my real estate dealings.

*Open-ended questions.* Respondents were given the opportunity to answer three open-ended questions which were presented separately and mixed between the fixed choice items on the survey instrument. Thinking back, what reasons did you have for selecting the real estate profession? How has the downturn in the real estate market impacted your work decisions? Is there anything else you would like to share related to your experiences in the real estate profession?

*Demographics.* Respondents reported their sex, age, tenure, full-time/part-time job status, and job classification (agent, assistant broker, broker).

### Results

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted for all study variables based on wave of data collection and sex. No significant differences were found, an indication that the sample data all come from a single population. We ran two analyses to determine if the data suffers substantially from common method bias. A Harmon single-factor test returned four components with eigenvalues greater than 1 (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986), with at most 25 percent of the variance explained by a single factor (Podsakoff

*et al.*, 2003). We then ran two confirmatory factor analyses using AMOS, one with the four factor model (learning, avoid, satisfaction, occupational withdrawal intentions) and a second with an added latent common methods variance factor (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). A comparison was made between the hypothesized four factor solution and the solution assuming a common methods variance factor by reviewing the Akaike's Information Criteria statistics (AIC; see Hu and Bentler, 1995). The AIC can be used to compare two models, with smaller values an indicator of a better fit (Byrne, 2001). The AIC was smaller in the four factor model (AIC = 324.12) than in the common methods variance factor model (AIC = 340.00). The results of the AIC and the Harmon single-factor tests are an indication that common method bias is not a substantial problem in this study.

In order to explore the relations among the constructs and to assess the predictive validity of the independent variables, Smart PLS (Ringle *et al.*, 2005) was utilized. PLS is the preferred method of analysis when the research objective is predictive rather than confirmatory (Hair *et al.*, 2011). PLS analyses require no missing data, so a sample of 225 respondents was utilized. Bootstrapping was conducted with 1,000 resamplings and 100 iterations. Table I displays the results for the measurement models. The variables loaded satisfactorily on the constructs with adequate AVE and reliability indicators. In all cases the average variance explained by the construct was greater than the squared

Constructs Instrument variables	Standardized loadings	Critical ratio <sup>a</sup>	AVE <sup>b</sup>	Composite reliability
<i>Avoid goal orientation</i>				
AG1	0.64	5.68	0.57	0.84
AG2	0.76	9.68		
AG3	0.85	12.40		
AG4	0.76	8.87		
<i>Learning goal orientation</i>				
LG1	0.61	7.18	0.53	0.85
LG2	0.79	12.52		
LG3	0.85	20.07		
LG4	0.81	14.13		
LG5	0.55	5.14		
<i>Satisfaction</i>				
S1	0.83	30.08	0.67	0.85
S2	0.76	18.31		
S3	0.85	35.44		
S4	0.83	30.98		
<i>Withdrawal attitude</i>				
disappt	0.77	15.71	0.52	0.76
enter	0.71	12.62		
expand	0.67	10.57		
<i>Withdrawal behavior</i>				
keep	0.75	5.49		
outside	0.91	10.27		

**Table I.**  
Measurement model

**Notes:**  $n = 225$ . <sup>a</sup>Values exceeding 2.58 represent levels of significant at the 0.01 level; <sup>b</sup>AVE average variance explained: percentage of variance of the construct explained by the latent variable

correlations between the model constructs, an indication of discriminant validity (see Table II). In addition, all item loadings were greater than all of their cross-loadings, another indication of discriminant validity.

Of the 241 returned surveys, 211 respondents answered at least one of the open-ended questions. Content analysis was utilized to evaluate the responses to the second item: How has the downturn in the real estate market impacted your work decisions? Of the 195 replies to this item, just over half ( $n = 102$ ) replied that the changes in the real estate market led to specific changes in how they performed their job. Comments such as: "It is an opportunity to learn and try different things; Everything needs to be more long term and strategic; I work harder"; and "When the going gets tough, the tough get going"; reflect the attitude that the challenging market requires the continuing real estate professional to adapt and put in additional effort. An additional 23 respondents agreed that their work decisions were altered because of the market changes, but did not provide specific examples of what those changes were. Some ( $n = 20$ ) respondents shared how they were suffering from the downturn in the market conditions, while others ( $n = 12$ ) indicated that things had gotten so bad they had already given up on the occupation. Few ( $n = 5$ ) respondents wrote that they were not facing a challenge and were doing quite well. Overall the results of the content analysis of the open-ended questions support the study's assumption that the 2009 real estate market did offer a challenge to the real estate professional.

Table III displays the results of the path analyses for the hypotheses under study. The first five hypotheses tested the relations between job satisfaction and withdrawal attitude and behavior and of goal orientation and job satisfaction and withdrawal attitude and behavior. *H6* and *H7* proposed that job satisfaction mediated the effect of learning and avoid goal orientations on withdrawal attitude and behavior.

#### *Job satisfaction to withdrawal*

The results of the path analysis indicate that there is a significant negative relation between job satisfaction to occupational withdrawal attitude, but not to withdrawal behavior, providing support for *H1a*, but no support for *H1b*. Although Mobley theorized a heuristic model of turnover which included thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors associated with employee withdrawal, statistically the findings suggest that the different aspects of employee withdrawal may be a function of different antecedents.

#### *Goal orientation to job satisfaction*

A significant positive relation was found from learning goal orientation to job satisfaction (supporting *H2*) but not from avoid orientation to job satisfaction (no support for *H4*).

Constructs	1	2	3	4
1. Avoid goal orientation	(0.57)			
2. Learning goal orientation	0.06	(0.53)		
3. Satisfaction	0.00	0.08	(0.67)	
4. Withdrawal attitude	0.04	0.03	0.31	(0.51)
5. Withdrawal behavior	0.05	0.07	0.21	0.42

**Notes:**  $n = 225$ . Values calculated as the square of the correlation coefficient. Values in parentheses are average communalities (AVEs), which are not calculated for formative constructs

**Table II.**  
Discriminant validity  
of the constructs in  
the model

LODJ 36,7	Hypotheses	Direct effect	Total effect	Critical ratio	R <sup>2</sup>
	<i>Satisfaction</i>				0.08
	H2 Learning→satisfaction	0.28		3.97**	
	H4 Avoid→satisfaction	0.00		0.07	
<b>826</b>	<i>Withdrawal attitude</i>				0.34
	H1a Satisfaction→withdrawal	-0.56		9.56**	
	H3a Learning→withdrawal	0.04		0.55	
	H5a Avoid→withdrawal	0.17		2.22*	
	H6a Learning→satisfaction→withdrawal		-0.12	1.56	
	H7a Avoid→satisfaction→withdrawal		0.17	2.23	
	<i>Withdrawal behavior</i>				0.57
	H1b Satisfaction→withdrawal	0.00		0.15	
	H3b Learning→withdrawal	-0.07		1.76	
	H5b Avoid→withdrawal	0.05		1.04	
	H6b Learning→satisfaction→withdrawal		-0.14	2.34*	
	H7b Avoid→satisfaction→withdrawal		0.14	1.97*	
	<i>Control variable</i>				
	Income→withdrawal behavior	-0.38		6.75**	
	<b>Notes:</b> $n = 225$ . * $p < 0.05$ ; ** $p < 0.01$				

**Table III.**  
Results: path  
estimates of  
the model

That is, for a challenging job environment, employees reporting higher levels of learning goal orientation also reported increases in job satisfaction. No statistical relation was found between avoid orientation and job satisfaction.

#### *Withdrawal attitude*

No significant relation was found from learning goal orientation to withdrawal attitude (no support for *H3a*). That is, respondents who reported increases in learning goal orientation are not more or less likely to indicate an increase in their attitude to withdraw from a career in real estate. However, a positive relation was found from avoid goal orientation to withdrawal attitude, providing support for *H5a*. Thus, respondents who reported increases in avoid goal orientation were more likely to report increases in their reported attitude to withdraw from a career in real estate.

#### *Withdrawal behavior*

No significant relations were found from learning goal orientation to withdrawal behavior (no support for *H3b*) or from avoid goal orientation to withdrawal behaviors (no support for *H5b*). That is, neither measure of goal orientation was found to be significantly related to employee withdrawal behavior.

#### *Mediation*

The findings indicate that job satisfaction fully mediates the effect of learning goal orientation on withdrawal behavior, supporting *H6b*, but does not mediate the relation between learning goal orientation and withdrawal attitude. Likewise, in test of *H7*, a significant relation was found from avoid goal orientation through job satisfaction to withdrawal behavior, but not to withdrawal attitude. That is, all effects found between avoid goal orientation and withdrawal attitude were associated with the direct effect of avoid goal orientation on withdrawal attitude and not through job satisfaction.

## Discussion

Individual employee characteristics, combined with job requirements and attitudes are of interest to managers and researchers alike if they can be used to predict and understand the constructs of occupational withdrawal attitude and behavior. One such individual employee characteristic is that of goal orientation. Prior research (Fortunato and Goldblatt, 2006) suggested that goal orientation may be a good predictor of job-related behaviors, the findings from this study provides some support for that view. Lin and Chang's (2005) study on job turnover concluded that learning goal orientation was significantly related to turnover, in that employees with higher levels of learning goal orientation were more likely to leave their jobs. The results of this study do not support this prior finding. Instead, the results suggest that the relation between learning goal orientation and occupational withdrawal behavior is fully mediated by job satisfaction. That is, higher levels of learning orientation led to higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of withdrawal behavior. Past research has overwhelmingly supported the importance of job satisfaction as a mediator between individual employee characteristics and job withdrawal attitude and behavior. The finding that this relation holds for the relation between learning goal orientation and occupational withdrawal is particularly important, as research suggests that goal orientation can be shifted through training and feedback (see Janssen and VanYperen, 2004; VandeWalle *et al.*, 1999). By utilizing training and feedback to increase learning goal orientation, employers have a possible means for effecting job satisfaction and ultimately withdrawal attitude and behavior. "Task performance may be enhanced for some individuals by training them to understand that many forms of ability can be developed and that effort is an important determinant of performance success" (VandeWalle *et al.*, 1999, p. 256). Thus, employees who are taught that negative results are due to poor effort (vs poor ability) are more likely to adapt a learning goal orientation which may decrease withdrawal intentions. Managers should also encourage employees with motivation techniques that stress a learning goal orientation (motivation to try harder and learn new techniques) instead of one that stresses a performance goal orientation (competitive sales contests; VandeWalle *et al.*, 1999). A learning goal orientation stresses the importance for employees to adjust their work strategies to ensure continued success (Bell and Kozlowski, 2002; Colquitt and Simmering, 1998) with a focus on effort as a way to overcome obstacles (Creed *et al.*, 2009). In this way, training and feedback programs to increase the learning goal orientation of employees have the potential to significantly increase employee job satisfaction and by association, reduce withdrawal attitude and behavior. Although findings indicate that job satisfaction mediates the relation between learning goal orientation and occupational withdrawal behavior, no such relation was found for withdrawal attitude. This is an interesting finding as it lends support for theory that occupational withdrawal is a long process with many intermediate steps, including thinking, planning, intentions, and behaviors.

The findings suggest that avoid goal orientation is an important concept in occupational withdrawal attitude, although not through satisfaction. Instead, the results of this study suggests that avoid goal orientation directly impacts occupational withdrawal attitude without impacting job satisfaction. Individuals reporting higher levels of avoid learning orientation expressed significantly greater occupational withdrawal attitude. This differs from the relation between avoid goal orientation and withdrawal behavior which is indirect through satisfaction.

Research and theory support the proposition that individuals with high levels of learning orientation are more likely to successfully adapt to changing and volatile work

conditions (Marques-Quinteiro and Cural, 2012). While this study's findings supported the relations between learning goal orientation and job satisfaction, that conflicted with findings reported by Harris *et al.* (2005) who did not find a significant relation between learning goal orientation and job satisfaction. Although Harris *et al.* (2005) did sample real estate associates, the date of the study is prior to the market crash and it is possible that the job of a real estate associate is significantly different pre- and post-crash. It is also possible that individuals attracted to the field during the bubble are significantly different from those individuals joining before the bubble and from those who remain. These suppositions are supported by the following respondent comments. "Before the downturn, the real estate business was an illusion, today it is hard work. The stress level is very high as all aspects of this industry are difficult and changing constantly. I think this downturn will be good for true real estate professionals, so many people 'jumped in' when it was a seller's market, many were unscrupulous and difficult to work with due to lack of any real knowledge, and many of them have left the market since they don't have the skills to deal with this downturn." Further investigation of employees who elect to leave or stay when faced with a challenging market is an interesting area for future research.

As with all research, this study does have some limitations. First, all the data were collected as self-report measures at a single point in time and have the potential for respondent error. However, procedures and measures were selected to lessen this effect somewhat. Using an anonymous survey design, selecting items with differing endpoints, separating the predictor and criterion variables on the instrument, and using a composite measure of withdrawal are all methods which may aid in the reduction of response and common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003, 2012). In addition, inviting participation and collecting data electronically may bias the sample against those who are not frequent users of e-mail and the internet, although statistics indicate this is a low percentage for the population under study. Given that most (81 percent; Bishop *et al.*, 2010), Florida Realtors work as independent contractors, the findings of this study may not generalize to other occupations. Thus, future research is needed to further investigate the relation between goal orientation and withdrawal attitude and behavior. Finally, much of the related literature testing the relation between goal orientation and satisfaction and withdrawal is based on a two component model of goal orientation. The shift in the literature from a two component to a three component measure of goal orientation (see Elliot, 1999) provides both positive and negative outcomes (DeShon and Gillespie, 2005). On the positive side, better defined constructs aid in our understanding of how performance orientation is related to employee and organizational outcomes. On the negative side, the shift makes it more difficult to compare findings across multiple studies (Kaplan and Maehr, 2007).

With the lengthy educational requirements for many professions and widespread worker shortages in occupations like nursing and engineering (Associated Press, 2008; Morsch, 2006), the study of occupational withdrawal grows in importance. In addition, research suggests that goal orientation can be modified through training and feedback (VandeWalle *et al.*, 1999; see also Noordzij *et al.*, 2013). With goal orientation found to be a significant antecedent to withdrawal behavior and attitudes, employers could provide training to help employees shift their goal orientations in an effort to reduce withdrawal intentions. This is especially helpful for job classifications at risk of worker shortages.

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### Appendix

Occupational withdrawal.

I am disappointed in how things are going for me in the real estate profession right now (disaptt).

If I had it to do all over again, I likely would not have entered the real estate profession (enter).

I often think about expanding my non-real estate opportunities (expand).

I'm not sure how long I will keep my real estate license active (keep).

At this time, I spend more time on work outside of real estate (outside).

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