

Public Servants' Voluntary Withdrawal Intention in the Careers of Federal Direct Public Administration in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Voluntary withdrawal intention (VWI) is the idealized process of leaving an organization. VWI can lead to a loss of institutional memory, higher costs for personnel replacement, and an overload on remaining staff. Drawing on unfolding and embeddedness theories, this study identifies a new mechanism linking negative shocks to turnover intention. **Methods:** The study supports the idea that organizational cynicism and professional achievement mediate the relationship between VWI and organizational change. Structural equation modeling was used with data from 378 federal public servants in Brazil. **Results:** The results indicate that organizational cynicism and professional achievement play a role in this relationship. The model explains 70.70% of the variance in VWI. **Conclusions:** These findings have implications for research on employee turnover intentions and people management, improving our understanding of predictors and relationships. The study also explores both theoretical and practical implications, which are particularly important due to the limited research in the Brazilian federal public sector.



Data Availability: Silva, A. C. A. D. M. (2023, May 9). Article VWI. Retrieved from osf.io/gu576.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature reviews on dismissal and turnover suggest the necessity of conducting studies in various contexts to better comprehend the shift in the causes and consequences of these phenomena (Hom et al., 2017). Studies examining new contexts of employee withdrawal have found that the process of leaving is not always strictly rational. Employees can take different cognitive paths or trajectories when deciding to leave an organization. The unfolding model suggests that there are multiple paths for employees to consider before making this decision (Mitchell & Lee, 2001).

For decades, research on employee turnover has often lacked comprehensive theories to explain the entire process and illustrate the proximal and distal variables involved in the cognitive process of leaving a job (Hom et al., 2017). At the end of the 20th century, theories explaining employee turnover were based on motivational hypotheses. These theories examined both work-related (proximal) factors, like promotion opportunities, as well as non-work-related (distal) issues, such as pregnancy, that impact employees' decisions to stay or leave an organization (Hom & Griffeth, 1991; March & Simon, 1958; Mobley, 1977). To develop a more valid and comprehensive theory at the start of the 21st century, scholars introduced new constructs, such as shocks or shocking events (including external occurrences), that trigger thoughts of departing and result in different paths to turnover. Mitchell and Lee's (2001) unfolding model of employee turnover changed the traditional approach by acknowledging that individuals who leave a job may not necessarily transition to another one. Instead, some may exit the job market to pursue full-time studies or take on the role of stay-at-home parents. This cognitive trajectory, which may culminate in leaving the organization, is preceded by values, personal attitudes toward work and the organization, assessment of individual career paths, examination of employees' social circles and associations, personal characteristics (e.g., impulsivity), and evaluation of the direct consequences linked to departure. In this study, we examined the extent to which events are considered a shock and analyzed how organizational and career factors may influence employees' voluntary withdrawal intention (VWI) to leave public service.

Mitchell and Lee (2001) introduced the concept of job embeddedness to explore why individuals decide to stay in organizations despite facing the trajectories described in the unfolding model. According to job embeddedness theory, employees choose to remain because of their involvement in the organization, so-

cial relationships, and the perceived consequences of leaving.

The VWI process for civil servants fulfills the literature review requirements as it is distinct from situations where employees must assess job opportunities and other related variables. In Brazil, public agencies do not promptly replace federal public servants because of the regulations governing the selection process, appointment, and filling of vacancies. Federal public servants in Brazil can transfer or resign from a public administration entity without forfeiting their position or salary, leading to significant staff turnover and the need to replenish personnel. Therefore, the lack of a federal public servant can result in the loss of institutional memory (Verma & Kesari, 2020), the necessity for personnel replacement, increased expenses for recruiting and training new employees (Sharma & Stol, 2020), excessive workloads, and work disruptions (Diógenes et al., 2016). Data from the management report prepared by the Brazilian Ministry of Economy showed that 696 new federal public servants joined the organization in 2019. Additionally, 1,563 individuals left, leading to a shortage of public servants in the organization (Ministério da Economia, 2019).

Given the potential problems, it is essential to investigate the process of federal public servants withdrawing from a work environment. The process starts with the employee's thoughts, which lead to decisions and evaluation regarding leaving the organization (Hom et al., 2017; Hom & Griffeth, 1991). This concept is known as turnover intention. A recent meta-analysis found that all withdrawal intentions were measured this way (Carpenter & Berry, 2017). In this study, we researched public servants' VWI in the careers of federal direct public administration in Brazil. VWI is the idealized process of a public servant intending to migrate from their current organization to another within Brazil's federal executive branch. Since public servants in Brazil are guaranteed not to be easily dismissed from work, in this study, we aimed to explain their VWI by examining how variables related to perceptions of organizational events and attitudes toward the organization, work, and career can influence the decision to leave the current work context.

This study examined the relationships between the shock caused by organizational change on VWI and the relationships between organizational cynicism and career expectations, assessing their impact on the intention to leave the organization based on the unfolding model and job embeddedness model (Hom et al., 2012; 2017; Lee et al., 2014; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). Although studies have explored these variables, no ordinary association has been made. The relation-

ship between organizational cynicism and career expectations has received limited attention in turnover research. This study aims to enhance understanding of these issues, which could influence thoughts of leaving. A review of the literature highlights the need to broaden prior studies concerning VWI (Hom et al., 2017) and the lack of national studies on this subject in public sector settings (Seidl et al., 2019). The article is structured as follows: theoretical basis and hypotheses, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion.

THEORETICAL BASIS AND HYPOTHESES

The unfolding theory and job embeddedness theory

The turnover literature confirms that intentions are an excellent predictor of an employee's departure, according to studies initiated by prediction models based on linear decision models that would lead to VWI (Mobley et al., 1979). The field of VWI now includes employees considering their work environment and constantly evaluating if they should stay with the organization. Unlike a purely rational analysis focused on satisfaction and VWI (Hom & Griffeth, 1991; Lambert & Hogan, 2009; Mobley, 1977), the unfolding theory expands options and identifies four potential paths that can trigger turnover intentions (Mitchell & Lee, 2001).

The unfolding model suggests that an employee may begin contemplating leaving an organization after experiencing a shock, such as an event that challenges their system of beliefs and images, leading to thoughts of departure (Hom et al., 2017; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). The employee may perceive this shock as negative, positive, or neutral (Mitchell & Lee, 2001) and it may involve various events (Yang et al., 2020). The decision to stay or leave depends on individual choice and how much the shock affects deliberation and mental processes about value, image, and trajectory in the organization (Hom et al., 2012; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). Studies indicate that 60% of departures are preceded by shocks (Weller et al., 2009).

The unfolding model specifies four distinct turnover paths. The first is a conventional affect-initiated path, where dissatisfied employees resign after receiving job offers (Hom & Griffeth, 1991). However, Mitchell and Lee (2001) hypothesized that shocks lead to three other paths. The second path happens when shocks may activate a preexisting exit plan (matching script), inducing turnover. For example, a woman quits when she becomes pregnant (a shock) due to preexisting plans to raise a child full-time. Additionally, negative shocks at work may violate employees' values, goals,

or goal strategies (image violations, such as a boss pressuring a subordinate to commit a crime), leading them to reconsider their attachment to the organization as a third possible path. Unsolicited job offers (a shock) induce the last path, in which employees compare the offers with their current job and look for additional jobs for future comparisons.

Alternative job opportunities are promptly assessed for compatibility with personal values or goals, filtering out those that are not compatible. The last path proposes that recurring dissatisfaction can lead employees to leave the organization after numerous attempts by the employer to destroy employees' job expectations. Mitchell and Lee (2001) introduced a new perspective on employee turnover, acknowledging that not all job leavers move to another job. Instead, some opt to pursue further education or take on the role of a stay-at-home parent.

Mitchell and Lee (2001) introduced the concept of job embeddedness to examine why people choose to remain in organizations. They identified three key factors: (a) fit, referring to compatibility with work groups and communities; (b) ties or connections with individuals and groups in the organization and community; and (c) the sacrifice of something they would have to forego if they were to leave their job (Lee et al., 2014; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). The unfolding model and job embeddedness model have advanced the literature by demonstrating the presence of distal influences (e.g., work characteristics), intermediate antecedents (e.g., employee attitudes), and direct proximal antecedents to turnover intention. These models explain the paths of leaving an organization, as well as those that keep employees embedded in their work (Hom et al., 2012; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). These theories have identified new processes and constructs, expanding the concepts that explain employee turnover (Hom et al., 2017).

In the scope of this research, shocks advocated by Mitchell and Lee (2001) are modifications in the context of an organizational change that makes the employee reflect on their relationship with their employer (Babalola et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2020). Organizational change refers to any modification within a public or private organization that affects employees and is perceived as a potential threat or challenge (Ramos & Neiva, 2013). Organizational changes may not always come as shocks. However, the history, sequence, and frequency of these changes can significantly impact employees' attitudes toward the organization and their work environment.

The influence of organizational change on federal public servants can be assessed by looking at its

attributes. These include how individual employees perceive the variables in the organizational context that characterize the changes. Scholars have suggested the importance of delving further into this topic (Bartunek & Woodman, 2015; Maes & Van Hootegeem, 2011; Micelotta et al., 2017). Whether considered successful or a failure, history influences how employees evaluate previous experiences of organizational change. It also shapes their feedback and challenges their beliefs and expectations about the future (Devos et al., 2007). Another attribute examined in this study is the chronological sequence of events in the change process and the presence of any observed order in these events (Bartunek & Woodman, 2015).

Depending on the type of attribute assessed, the correlations with VWI may be negative, as reported in studies that evaluated frequent changes (Babalola et al., 2016) and the participation of collaborators (Aslam et al., 2016). Studies that have assessed the form of implementation of change processes positively correlate this with VWI (Raza et al., 2018). A review of the aspects of employee termination must include context to predict and understand this phenomenon (Hom et al., 2017). As organizational changes may fail (Beer & Nohria, 2000), this research considered that the more negative the perception of federal public servants on prior success records and defined steps of organizational change, the higher the VWI. The study proposed the following hypothesis:

H1: Organizational change is negatively related to the VWI of federal public servants.

Organizational cynicism

Employees appear to be growing more cynical in the new millennium, particularly in corporate settings. This is influenced by the waning public trust in government, labor unions, and businesses (Andersson & Bateman, 1997), brought on by issues such as corruption (money laundering), extremely high salaries, and bonuses. Cynicism is pervasive among organizational members in the United States (Mirvis & Kanter, 1989), Europe, and Asia (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). The management literature suggests that employee cynicism arises from a lack of trust within the organization (Chiaburu et al., 2013) and breaches of psychological contract (Bashir & Nasir, 2013; Pugh et al., 2003). Cynics distrust their superiors or employers and, therefore, limit their social connections with them (Mirvis & Kanter, 1989; Neves, 2012). They believe that their contributions will be exploited by employers when given the chance (Pugh et al., 2003). Employee

cynicism is characterized by negative emotions such as contempt, frustration, and hopelessness.

The shock created by organizational changes creates a variety of emotional reactions, cognitive assessments, and behavioral tendencies (Nery et al., 2019; Nery & Neiva, 2015). Employees' attitudes and future behaviors are shaped by their individual responses to events within the organizational context (Choi, 2011; Zimmerman et al., 2016). Negative attitudes such as cynicism can develop when employees perceive organizational change as threatening and unclear. However, change management research has often overlooked how past organizational change management history influences employee attitudes and behaviors (Bordia et al., 2011). Organizational members need to have a clear and logical plan for organizational change that can provide guidance and reassurance to employees.

Previous research has identified various negative reactions to change, including stress, cynicism, optimism, and neuroticism (Oreg et al., 2011). Organizational cynicism is an attitude reflecting pessimistic thoughts, negative impacts, and critical behaviors directed at the organization (Brandes et al., 1998) due to federal public servants' lack of belief in the organization's capacity to implement a certain change (Thundiyl et al., 2015). Furthermore, the assessed characteristics can either positively (Brown et al., 2017) or negatively (Thundiyl et al., 2015) relate to organizational cynicism.

To reduce organizational cynicism among federal public servants, it is crucial for them to understand the history of successful changes and the sequence of steps taken. Therefore, we hypothesize that the more positively public servants perceive past successful changes and the defined steps in the organizational change process, the lower their level of organizational cynicism will be:

H2: Organizational change is negatively related to attitudes of organizational cynicism among federal public servants.

Employee cynicism refers to an attitude characterized by pessimism, suspicion, and hostility toward progressive organizational change. It is not necessarily linked to negative individual traits or affectivity (Ulmer, 1992). Cynicism arises when certain institutions do not meet contemporary expectations (Andersson, 1996; Mirvis & Kanter, 1989). Individuals with negative attitudes toward their jobs and organizations are more likely to have negative job intentions, including VWI (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977).

Studies have focused on the affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions of employee cynicism. The organizational perspective of cynicism arises from employees' belief that their organization lacks integrity (Grama & Todericiu, 2016). The emotional dimension involves feelings of anger and shame when witnessing the organization linked to actions like corruption or inadequate public service provision (Arslan, 2018). The behavioral dimension involves derogatory and critical comments made by employees about the organization, which can harm relationships among colleagues (Salessi & Omar, 2014). The cognitive dimension involves reflecting on past experiences, available information, and knowledge that indicate a misalignment between the organization's objectives and the employee's beliefs (Grama & Todericiu, 2016; Koçoglu, 2014). Studies have found negative relationships between affective organizational commitment and employee turnover (Gyensare et al., 2017), affective and behavioral dispositional resistance (Aslam et al., 2016), and affective professional commitment (Chang et al., 2019). Two studies found a positive association between cynicism and VWI (Abubakar et al., 2017; Munir et al., 2016). In this study, we hypothesized that higher levels of organizational cynicism among public servants would result in higher levels of VWI. This study proposed the following hypothesis:

H3: Federal public servants' attitudes of organizational cynicism are positively related to VWI.

Career expectations in the organization

The unfolding and job embeddedness models suggest that distal, intermediate, and direct proximal antecedents can influence an employee's choice to either leave or remain in an organization (Hom et al., 2012; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). Career expectations in the organization involve envisioning one's future professional path within the designated workplace, achieving professional goals, attaining career success, and maintaining a work-life balance that does not compromise one's personal life (Vasconcellos & Neiva, 2016; 2017). Career goals can include aspirations such as becoming a valuable member of an organization, earning a promotion or taking on more challenging tasks (Lapointe et al., 2019), implementing strategies to achieve a better work-life balance (Guzeller & Celiker, 2019), gaining recognition from peers, and pursuing activities aligned with personal preferences (Vasconcellos & Neiva, 2016). Career expectations can either be a distal or intermediate factor that affects job embeddedness, which in turn influences VWI. An employee's decision to stay or leave depends on their

assessment of their feelings, work environment, and how shock influences their thoughts and mental processes regarding value, image, and their future trajectory within the organization (Mitchell & Lee, 2001). In this study, we measured career expectations within the organization based on two dimensions: professional achievement and career-personal life ratio.

We did not find any studies linking career expectations in an organization to cynicism, possibly because it is a recent construct. However, studies have investigated the connection between cynicism and career stage. Employees with less tenure and in an early career stage, not yet managers, score lower on cynicism (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2005). In contrast, cynicism is highest among police chiefs during the early years of their tenure and decreases gradually with experience. This relationship follows a curvilinear pattern between measures of police chiefs' cynicism and career stage (Lotz & Regoli, 1977; Regoli et al., 1990). Moderate levels of cynicism have been found among prison officers at all career stages (Akoensi & Amankwah-Amoah, 2023). There is also theoretical support for the deleterious effects of cynicism on behaviors and attitudes in the job environment (Chiaburu et al., 2013; Thundiyil et al., 2015). Additionally, some studies have linked cynicism negatively to variables affecting professional life, such as engagement (Nguyen et al., 2018), satisfaction (Salessi & Omar, 2018), and commitment (Fauzan, 2019). Given the inconclusive results, it is assumed that cynicism triggers employees to question whether they will achieve their professional aspirations in their organization and if they will be able to achieve a work-life balance. In this study, we hypothesized that higher levels of organizational cynicism would be associated with lower professional expectations among federal public employees regarding their careers and their current organization. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4a: The attitudes of organizational cynicism of federal public servants are negatively related to career-personal life ratio.

H4b: The attitudes of organizational cynicism of federal public servants are negatively related to professional achievement in the organization.

Public servants' perceptions of their professional expectations can raise questions about their work achievements and aspirations for their careers. This may ultimately influence their decision to leave their current position (Lin, 2019). Career satisfaction, an aspect of professional expectations, has a negative

effect on VWI (Aburumman et al., 2020). A negative relationship has been found between career success perception, a component of professional expectations, and VWI (Agapito et al., 2015). Research on these constructs in the federal public service is in its early stages, indicating that more investigation is needed. This study proposed the following hypotheses:

H5a: Career-personal life ratio in an organization is negatively related to VWI.

H5b: Professional achievement in the organization is negatively related to VWI.

The unfolding model explains that turnover is the end result of the VWI. Throughout the decision to stay or leave, an employee faces many distal determinants and different intermediate attitude causes before making a decision (Mitchell & Lee, 2001). This study examined VWI by looking at the antecedents of distal and intermediate professional achievement. Studies have explored various mediating relationships with VWI and have found that career satisfaction mediated the relationship between remuneration, performance evaluation, and VWI (Aburumman et al., 2020). Other studies have analyzed the mediation of attitudes toward fear, acceptance, and skepticism about organizational change (Franco et al., 2016; Nery & Neiva, 2015). And readiness for change mediated the relationship between role ambiguity and the VWI (Chênevert et al., 2019). This study proposed the following hypotheses:

H6: The attitudes of organizational cynicism mediate the relationship between organizational change and VWI.

H7a: The relationship between organizational cynicism and VWI is mediated by the career-personal life ratio in the organization.

H7b: The relationship between organizational cynicism and VWI is mediated by professional achievement.

H8a: The relationship between organizational change and VWI is mediated by attitudes of organizational cynicism and the career-personal life ratio in the organization.

H8b: The relationship between organizational change and VWI is mediated by attitudes of organizational cynicism and professional achievement.

The main aim of the study was to examine the relationship between the attributes of the context of organizational change (historical and sequence) and VWI, with attitudes of organizational cynicism and career expectations in the organization (professional achievement and career-personal life ratio) as mediators, as shown in Figure 1. This objective aligns with the recent review by Seidl et al. (2019) on VWI in the public sector using the structural equation model (SEM). However, our study expands the existing research on VWI, consistent with the literature review of Hom et al. (2017). Another aim of the study was to explore the relationship between organizational cynicism and career expectations in organizations.

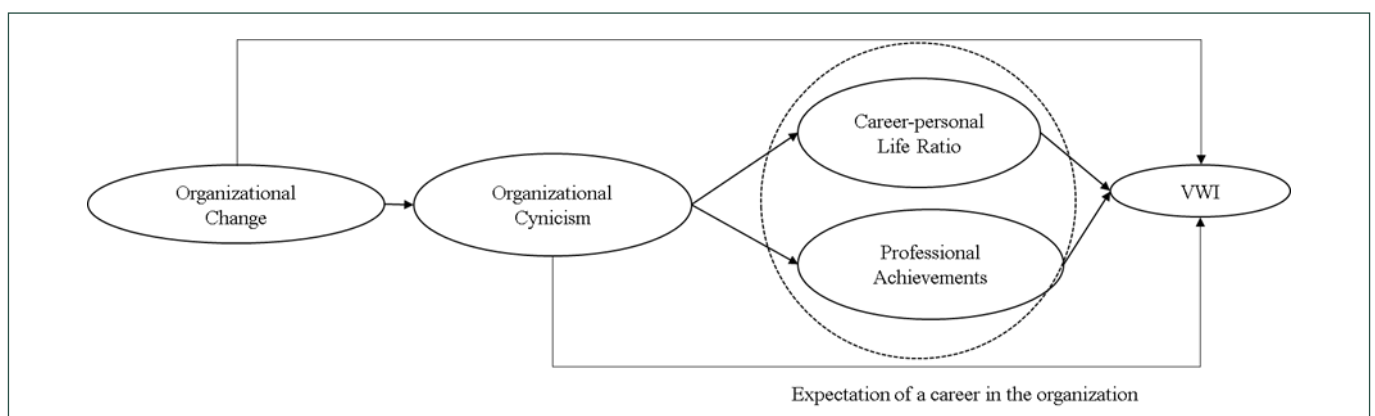


Figure 1. Model to be tested.

METHODS

Collection procedures

The research instrument was registered on the survey site, and an access link was sent via email to participants through their professional associations. Participants were asked to respond individually, voluntarily, and anonymously. Upon accessing the survey, participants read about the study's purpose, were assured anonymity and confidentiality, and were required to sign the Informed Consent Form. The Research Ethics Committee approved the study (protocol CAAE 36924820.1.0000.5540) in accordance with Resolution No. 510/2016 guidelines.

Instruments

Several scales were utilized to evaluate the research constructs. The initial scale was developed to assess organizational change, focusing on the sequence attribute with four items and history with three items. This scale underwent confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), demonstrating strong composite reliability ($CR = 0.92$) and $\alpha = 0.89$. The items in this scale included: 'The change process is organized in stages.'

To assess cynicism, the Organizational Cynicism Scale (Brandes et al., 1999) was used. It consists of three items measuring affective factor ($\alpha = 0.80$), five items for cognitive factor ($\alpha = 0.86$), and three items for behavioral factor ($\alpha = 0.78$). Items include: "I believe my organization says one thing and does another."

Career expectations were measured using a shortened version of the Organizational Career Expectations Scale (Vasconcellos & Neiva, 2016), which consists of two factors: professional achievements ($\alpha = 0.92$) with six items and career-personal life ratio ($\alpha = 0.90$) with four items. Items include: "I will have achieved relevant professional achievements in my career."

The VWI was assessed using the single-dimension Turnover Intention Scale (Siqueira et al., 2014) ($\alpha = 0.95$) comprising three items. Items include: "I think about leaving the organization where I work."

All items were evaluated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from one (totally disagree) to seven (totally agree). In addition to the 31 items on the scales, six demographic items were requested (gender, age, education, time of organization, entity, and occupation of the management position).

Sample

A total of 3,264 federal public servants were invited to participate in this study. The sample included career public servants from positions within the Brazilian federal executive branch, focusing on expertise in man-

agement and transversality. Transversality allows for working in any unit of direct administration, municipalities, and foundations. All these public servants were invited to participate, but only 10% responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent electronically to federal public servants through professional associations. Information from annual reports of each entity, available on their websites, indicated that higher bodies where participants worked in the past two years underwent restructuring, mergers, and changes in leadership. Additionally, the implementation of a national electronic process in all units and remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic were also noted.

Among the federal public servants invited to participate, 378 participants answered the questionnaire. The final sample mainly consisted of men (72.24%) aged between 35 and 40 years (27.16%), with specialization (44.18%), in a non-managerial position (55.22%), and working in the current organization for between 7 and 10 years (31.34%). These results are comparable to the population data from the statistical public servant panel on the Ministry of Economy's website.

Data analysis

Atypical data and assumptions were analyzed for multivariate statistical analyses, including normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and singularity. This was done using SPSS version 25 and RStudio (RStudio Team, 2020). After calculating the Mahalanobis distance ($p \leq 0.001$), 33 multivariate outliers were identified. These subjects were excluded from the analysis because they had a tendency to skew the results (Hair, 2019), resulting in 345 respondents in the database.

Multivariate asymmetry was confirmed with the Mardia's test ($p = 0.03$) (Mardia, 1970) and the psych package (Revelle, 2020). Linearity was confirmed through the RESET test ($p = 0.15$) (Ramsey, 1969), calculated using the LMtest package. Homoscedasticity was confirmed by the Box's M test ($p = 0.50$) and the Levene's test ($p > 0.05$). No signs of multicollinearity were found (tolerance > 0.10 and VIF < 5), and singularity was assumed (Hair, 2019; Kline, 2016).

After conducting the hypothesis test with SEM, the measurement model was verified through CFA. The CFA analysis was conducted in MPlus software version 7, utilizing the weighted least squares mean and variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimation method. This method considers the items as ordinal variables and does not assume the normality of the variables beforehand (Freitas et al., 2016; Muthén & Muthén, 2010). The SEM analysis was conducted using the lavaan package in RStudio (Rosseel, 2012; RStudio Team, 2020) with the diagonally weighted least squares (DWLS) estimator.

DWLS has the same properties as WLSMV for ordinal data and addresses issues related to normality.

The study examined the following indicators: Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) values should be 0.90 or higher; comparative fit index (CFI) should meet the same criterion; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) should be below 0.08; and the ratio between the chi-square (χ^2) and degrees of freedom (df) values should be less than 3 (Hair, 2019; Kline, 2016).

We tested a single-factor model to assess common method biases (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This model displayed poor fit, with $\chi^2/df = 7.27$, CFI = 0.61, TLI = 0.58, and RMSEA = 0.14, 90% CI [0.13, 0.14]. Thus, we do not anticipate significant method bias in our data.

RESULTS

The initial model achieved high scores in all CFA indicators (CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.97; $\chi^2/df = 2.53$, RMSEA = 0.07, 90% CI for RMSEA [0.06 – 0.07], $p < 0.001$) (Hair, 2019; Kline, 2016).

Standardized loads must be above 0.30 to be considered acceptable (Pasquali, 2011). Additionally, CR should be higher than 0.70, and the average variance extracted (AVE) for convergent validity should be greater than or equal to 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, 2019). Reliability was assessed using CR, which measures how consistently items reflect the same underlying concept (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Valentini & Damásio, 2016).

Discriminant validity indicates the distinction between different constructs. It was assessed by comparing the AVE of each scale with the square of the shared variance, which reflects the coefficient of determination between pairs of constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, 2019). Convergent validity shows that the items of a construct should have a high level of shared variance (Hair, 2019). The correlation between them ought to be less than 0.90 (Kline, 2016). The CR and AVE values for all constructs exceeded the designated cutoff points, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlations between first-order latent variables and CR.

LV	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	CR
OC	0.59	0.32	0.67	0.60	0.53	0.29	0.32	0.91
BC	-0.57	0.64	0.38	0.43	0.22	0.15	0.30	0.82
CC	-0.82	0.62	0.61	0.69	0.48	0.31	0.53	0.88
AC	-0.78	0.66	0.83	0.81	0.58	0.40	0.61	0.92
PA	0.73	-0.47	-0.69	-0.76	0.49	0.58	0.56	0.81
CPLR	0.54	-0.39	-0.56	-0.63	0.76	0.58	0.27	0.85
VWI	-0.57	0.55	0.73	0.78	-0.75	-0.52	0.94	0.98

Note. AVE in bold. All correlations below the diagonal are significant at the 0.01 level (two ends). LV – latent variable; OC – organizational change; BC – behavioral cynicism; CC – cognitive cynicism; AC – affective cynicism; PA – professional achievements; CPLR – career-personal life ratio; VWI – voluntary withdrawal intention; and CR – composite reliability.

Convergent validity and reliability were confirmed for the second-order variables through the calculation of AVE (≥ 0.50) and CR (≥ 0.70). However, discriminating validity for the latent variables of organizational cynicism and organizational change was not established (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlations between second-order latent variables and CR.

LV	1	2	3	4	5	CR
OC	0.61	0.77	0.53	0.29	0.32	0.91
OCY	-0.88	0.66	0.66	0.44	0.70	0.85
PA	0.73	-0.81	0.51	0.58	0.56	0.81
CPLR	0.54	-0.66	0.76	0.59	0.27	0.85
VWI	-0.57	0.84	-0.75	-0.52	0.94	0.98

Note. AVE in bold. All correlations below the diagonal are significant at the 0.01 level (two ends). In italics: the absence of discriminating validity. OCY – organizational cynicism. The other abbreviations are the same as in Table 1.

However, we decided to keep the LV in the structural model due to its significance. Despite not being per-

fect, hypothesis tests can still be conducted with LVs that have such issues (Tumelero et al., 2016).

Structural model and hypothesis test

SEM – Model 1 (M1) presents the hypothesis test for direct and mediation effects (Table 3). This model was compared to one in which the direct relationship was constrained to zero (Ato & Vallejo, 2011). The adjustment indices remained essentially the same, indicating no significant deterioration of the model. This suggests that partial mediation is taking place.

The first hypothesis (H1) predicted a negative relationship between VWI and organizational change. However, this prediction was not supported as the association found was moderate, positive, and significant ($\beta = 0.47$, $p = 0.00$). The same result was observed for H5a, which predicted a relationship between VWI and career-personal life ratio.

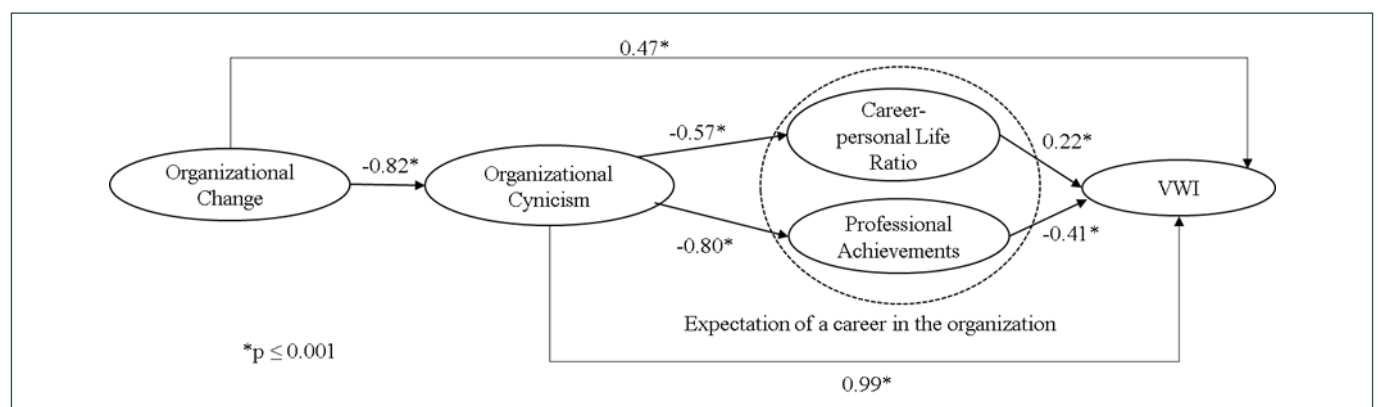
Table 3. SEM results.

Variables	H	b	M1		M2		β
			SE	β	SE	β	
VWI → OC (c)	1	0.84	0.22	0.47*	0	NA	0
OCY → OC (a)	2	-0.82	0.08	-0.82*	-0.79	0.08	-0.78*
VWI → OCY (b)	3	1.77	0.28	0.99*	0.95	0.14	0.54*
CPLR → OCY (d)	4a	-0.54	0.09	-0.57*	-0.57	0.10	-0.61*
PA → OCY (e)	4b	-0.85	0.10	-0.80*	-0.85	0.11	-0.81*
VWI → CPLR (f)	5a	0.41	0.14	0.22*	0.23	0.12	0.13*
VWI → PA (g)	5b	-0.70	0.15	-0.41*	-0.59	0.13	-0.35*
VWI → OCY → OC (ab)	6	-1.45	0.25	-0.81*	-0.75	0.12	-0.42*
VWI → CPLR → OCY (df)	7a	-0.36	0.12	-0.18*	-0.20	0.10	-0.10*
VWI → PA → OCY (eg)	7b	0.38	0.10	0.23*	0.34	0.10	0.21*
VWI → CPLR → OCY → OC (adf)	8a	0.29	0.10	0.15*	0.16	0.08	0.05*
VWI → PA → OCY → OC (aeg)	8b	-0.31	0.08	-0.19*	-0.27	0.08	-0.17*

Note. H – Hypothesis; SE – standard error; * $p \leq 0.001$. The other abbreviations are the same as in Tables 1 and 2. M1 – $\chi^2(\text{gl}) = 710.69(421)$, $p < 0.01$. CFI = 0.99. TLI = 0.99. RMSEA [IC 90%] = 0.04 [0.03-0.04] and SRMR = 0.05. M2 – $\chi^2(\text{gl}) = 752.19(422)$, $p < 0.01$. CFI = 0.99. TLI = 0.99. RMSEA [IC 90%] = 0.05 [0.04-0.05] and SRMR = 0.05

This hypothesis was also not supported as the association was small, positive, and significant ($\beta = 0.21$, $p = 0.01$). It is possible that a suppressor effect occurred due to the signal change (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Hierarchical linear regression was conducted with bootstrapping to correct for normality deviations and bias (Hayes, 2018) to determine if variables such as occupation in a managerial position, age, or tenure in the organization might lead to ambiguous interpretation of the results. Past studies have suggested potential confounding effects of these variables (Westerberg et al., 2021; Zeng et al., 2020). No significant relationships

were found with the research variables: time in the entity ($p = 0.10$), managerial function ($p = 0.76$), and age ($p = 0.36$). H2 ($\beta = -0.80$, $p = 0.00$), H3 ($\beta = 0.99$, $p = 0.00$), H4a ($\beta = -0.60$, $p = 0.00$), H4b ($\beta = -0.82$, $p = 0.00$), and H5b ($\beta = -0.82$, $p = 0.00$) were supported. The mediation hypotheses H6 ($\beta = -0.41$, $p = 0.00$), H7a ($\beta = -0.08$, $p = 0.08$), H7b ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.00$), H8a ($\beta = 0.06$, $p = 0.08$), and H8b ($\beta = -0.22$, $p = 0.00$) were confirmed. The general model (Figure 2) explained 70.70% of the variance in VWI, 67.2% in organizational cynicism, 52.10% in professional achievements, and 33.80% in the career-personal life ratio.

**Figure 2.** Final model.

DISCUSSION

The main contributions of this study are as follows: we explored VWI in the context of public service, a topic with limited existing research; evaluated distal and proximal variables related to perceptions and attitudes about the organization, career, and work environment; and assessed how organizational change may act as a shock for employees, impacting their intent to leave. This study builds upon the research of Mitchell and Lee (2001) by uncovering a new intermediate mechanism linking negative shocks and turnover intentions,

involving organizational cynicism and professional achievement. Our proposed model explains 70.70% of the variance in VWI, shedding light on the challenges federal public servants encounter when considering leaving their jobs. Another unique aspect of our study is the consideration of attributes of organizational change, its sequence, and history as antecedents of VWI, addressing a gap in the existing literature (Bartunek & Woodman, 2015; Maes & Van Hootegem, 2011; Micelotta et al., 2017).

This study shows that not all employees who experience shocks decide to leave the organization. The job embeddedness process (Mitchell & Lee, 2001) can help explain the challenges federal public servants encounter when dealing with organizational change. Organizational change attributes may not have been seen as shocks that could lead employees to consider leaving. SEM showed a positive connection between organizational change and VWI, so H1 was not confirmed. Federal public servants saw a positive history of changes and a structured series of events, but this led to an increase in their VWI. One potential reason could be changes in government policies, such as in the environmental sector, where there are shifts against global trends. However, some studies have supported the positive relationship between frequency (Babalola et al., 2016) and the method of implementing the change (Raza et al., 2018). This result may have been found because the scale did not assess the intensity and frequency of changes. Changes in public services with high levels of cynicism can trigger VWI due to the costly implications. Furthermore, potential loss of connections and ties within the organization makes federal public servants' withdrawal intention difficult to act upon (Mitchell & Lee, 2001). Evaluating personal costs and circumstances that may lead to perceiving organizational change as a shock, causing individuals to consider leaving the organization, is recommended for understanding this relationship.

This study establishes a direct relationship between organizational cynicism and variables associated with career expectations in the organization. No evidence of such connections was found in Google Scholar and Web of Science articles that discuss links between career-personal life ratio and professional achievements. Few studies have examined the relationship between organizational cynicism and career stage (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Burke & Mikkelsen, 2005; Lotz & Regoli, 1977; Regoli et al., 1990).

Organizational cynicism is the most robust variable in our model, showing strong direct relationships with all other variables and mediators. A significant negative relationship was observed between organizational cynicism and organizational change, which supports H2. Public servants perceive a positive track record of change and a well-structured sequence of events that diminishes criticism of the organization's practices and policies. A study of Australian nurses revealed a negative relationship between organizational cynicism and increased work controls following organizational changes (Nguyen et al., 2018). This relationship helps to manage work overload caused by the changes. One potential reason for this result is the significant rise in

federal public servants working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, a protective change that reduced organizational cynicism. This highlights the idea that work experiences influence this attitude (Lorinkova & Perry, 2017), consistent with a study that observed a reduction in the impact of cynicism on relationships with the frequency of organizational change when the human resources department strategically acted as a change agent, providing necessary information (Brown et al., 2017).

The connection between cynicism and VWI indicates that public servants experience greater VWI when they feel anxious about the organization (Abubakar et al., 2017; Munir et al., 2016). A longitudinal study in Canada revealed that cynicism and VWI only decreased when there was an effective leave policy (Mantler et al., 2015).

The relationships between organizational cynicism and career expectations (professional achievement and career-personal life ratio) are both negative and significant in the direction expected by the research hypotheses. Thus, the more the organization rewards one thing by saying that it expects another, the lower the perception of federal public servants that they will achieve relevant professional goals in their careers. As cynicism rises, expectations for career growth and advancement diminish among federal public servants.

Employee cynicism arises when individuals hold negative attitudes such as pessimism, suspicion, and hostility toward progressive organizational change. This behavior is often a result of specific institutions failing to meet their expectations in the context of modern life (Andersson, 1996; Mirvis & Kanter, 1989). Employees' sentiments are influenced by their perceptions of executive misconduct, inequity, and mishandling of funds (Wilhelm, 1993). When their concept of justice is violated, it leads to negative attitudes and distrust toward managers, colleagues, and the organization as a whole (Lind & Tyler, 1988). In addition to perceptions of justice, organizational performance may provoke negative reactions toward a firm and its executives. Therefore, cynics seem to present a persistent managerial challenge (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) proposed that individuals who have negative attitudes toward their jobs and organizations are more likely to have negative job intentions rather than positive ones. Negative job intentions may include VWI.

Organizational cynicism is a multifaceted concept that may develop as a defense mechanism by employees (Naus et al., 2007; Schmitz et al., 2018) in response to organizational changes. These changes can either result in positive transformations or drawbacks (Bouckenooghe, 2010), depending largely on how the

changes are carried out by those in charge. Research suggests that effective communication and thorough planning can help minimize resistance and distrust during periods of change (Grama & Todericiu, 2016).

When comparing professional expectations with VWI, a negative relationship with professional achievements was found. This contrasts with the career-personal life ratio, which moved in the opposite direction of the research hypothesis. This result contradicts previous studies in this field, which typically show negative relationships between VWI and related constructs like career satisfaction (Aburumman et al., 2020; Vem et al., 2019; Zeng et al., 2020) and successful integration of the organization (Sharma & Stol, 2020). The relationship is negative in a study of 370 Brazilian professionals from public and private organizations (Vasconcellos & Neiva, 2019).

Organizational cynicism negatively affects both professional achievement and career-personal life ratio. Professional achievement negatively influences the desire to leave, while the career-personal life ratio plays a positive role in this decision. A work environment that fosters cynicism can make achieving work-life balance more challenging, leading to thoughts of leaving. Thus, maintaining a healthy work-family balance is crucial for federal public servants in shaping their intentions to leave the organization.

An explanation for this phenomenon may be related to the pandemic. Several roles experienced by federal public servants (such as father, mother, spouse, citizen, professional, caregiver) had to be abruptly accommodated in their home environment. A study showed that with schools closed in the United States due to the pandemic, inequality between mothers and fathers in household and childcare tasks became evident. Women had a considerable increase in unpaid work compared to men (Heggeness, 2020). The suppressor effect observed in the SEM is likely caused by the hypothesized intricate connections and influence of organizational cynicism, the most influential variable that eliminated variance from the other relationships.

Organizational cynicism and professional achievements mediated the relationship between VWI and organizational change. A study in Canada assessed how cynicism influenced VWI by looking at why organizations adopt corporate social responsibility practices and engage in financial donations (Ogunfowora et al., 2018).

Research supports the mediation of organizational change and VWI through organizational cynicism. However, the mediation of these relationships through the career-personal life ratio was not significant. Career expectations mediated the relationship

between expectations of the organizational future and VWI (Vasconcellos & Neiva, 2019). Career development expectations mediated the relationship between economic citizenship and VWI (Lin, 2019). Career satisfaction mediated the relationship between VWI and career adaptability (Zhu et al., 2019), as well as the hierarchical plateau in careers (Xie et al., 2016).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has limitations, such as the potential for common variance. This is because all variables were collected from participants at one point in time (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To address this concern, scale items were randomly presented to participants, ensuring the anonymity of their responses. We tested a single-factor model to evaluate common method bias and minimize the influence of self-report measures. However, the model showed poor fit, suggesting a low risk of bias due to common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Another limitation of this study was the exclusive use of self-report measures sensitive to participants' social desirability. Future studies should incorporate variables or scales to mitigate this effect. The research was cross-sectional, with measurements taken at a single moment. A longitudinal design can investigate relationships after returning to in-person work post-pandemic to confirm or reveal new aspects of the model.

Further research can determine if there are variations in professional expectations between employees at the start and end of their careers. Recent studies in public sectors in various countries have revealed discrepancies in VWI levels based on employees' career stages (Lee, 2020). Future research can further investigate if the lack of professional achievements contributes to organizational change through expanding VWI.

CONCLUSION

This research contributes to understanding VWI, discussing new predictors, and measuring attributes of organizational change. It also supports mediation by organizational cynicism and professional achievements. There are few studies in the public sector on attitudes and motivations that can lead to VWI, with subsequent effective exchange of organizations by federal public servants. Therefore, the government must invest in diagnoses and promote actions aimed at reducing VWI in the careers of public servants in the federal executive branch.

This study highlights the impact of unfolding and embedding theories on shaping thoughts about leaving an organization. The intention to leave is closely linked to attitudes toward the organization and future career

prospects. However, these thought processes are not solely influenced by a single incident. Certain events may prompt a stronger desire to leave compared to others. Even when viewed positively, organizational changes can lead to organizational cynicism among employees, yet this does not automatically drive them to seek new job opportunities. Career prospects play a role in moderating the relationship between cynicism and turnover intentions, supporting the idea of embeddedness. Individuals who see potential for growth in their careers are less likely to consider leaving their current organization. Implementing interventions that sow doubt in employees' trust in the organization can have negative effects on their commitment and involvement as public servants.

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