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# A relational perspective on supervisor-initiated turnover: Implications for human resource management based on a multi-method investigation of leader–member exchange relationships

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## Abstract

Despite the great emphasis organizations and human resource management (HRM) research place on turnover issues, one turnover phenomenon has received only limited attention so far: joint leader–member turnover. This research examines supervisor-initiated turnover (SIT) (i.e., employees' decision to quit their employer to follow a former supervisor to a new organization) and develops a comprehensive model of the SIT decision process, grounded on conservation of resources (COR) theory, that delineates the resource evaluation, conservation and investment deliberations of employees. We take a relational perspective and particularly focus on the leader–member relationship as an important antecedent of SIT and thereby respond to the call for more critical investigations of leader–member exchange (LMX) and corresponding HRM implications. Our three studies (survey, scenario experiment, and dyadic interview study) demonstrate that LMX positively affects SIT intentions (SITI) and that supervisor commitment represents an important mediating mechanism of the LMX–SITI relationship. Our interview study with 46 leader–member dyads identifies relational factors that promote or hinder SIT beyond the leader–member relationship. We discuss the theoretical contributions and practical implications for HRM.

## KEYWORDS

commitment, COR theory, LMX, supervisor-initiated turnover intention, voluntary turnover

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Understanding the turnover decision and its antecedents is of utmost importance for all organizations and human resource (HR) managers (Klotz et al., 2021; Zimmerman et al., 2019). Accounting for the direct costs, work disruptions, and loss of organizational memory associated with voluntary turnover (Allen et al., 2010), significant research

endeavors have addressed its various forms and reasons (Klotz et al., 2021; Soltis et al., 2013). One reason why employees decide to leave their employer are successful poaching efforts of competitors' talent acquisition units, that identified them as valuable talents (Whysall et al., 2019). However, one important turnover phenomenon has received only limited attention: joint leader–member turnover. Although the prevalence of such joint turnover is difficult to quantify,

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numerous anecdotes (Shapiro et al., 2016) and increasingly promoted business practices, such as leader-initiated lift outs that entail hiring group leaders and (parts of) their high-functioning teams (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2006; Shapiro et al., 2016), prove that it is a relevant phenomenon. Such joint turnover is likely to result in enormous costs for organizations. Estimates suggest that average turnover costs are approximately 20% of employees' annual salary; in some situations, total costs can increase to 200% of that measure due to expenses related to hiring, training, and productivity losses (Boushey & Glynn, 2012). However, these figures are restricted to employee turnover; hence, the costs of joint leader–member turnover are assumed to be many times higher and therefore might be even more challenging for HR management (HRM) due to the need for a joint replacement.

By applying a relational lens to the important HRM outcome employee turnover (Klein et al., 2020), researchers increasingly highlight the central role that social relationships play in employees' turnover decisions (Jo & Ellingson, 2019). Employees' relationships with their leader, predominantly investigated through a leader–member exchange (LMX) lens, thereby act as a strong relational tie that binds employees to their employing organization (Allen et al., 2010; Jo & Ellingson, 2019). However, this overwhelmingly positive perspective on LMX in turnover contexts neglects the risks that might result from good LMX relationships (Ballinger et al., 2010). This prompts the question that if supervisors and subordinates develop strong relationships and the supervisor leaves the organization, do those subordinates follow their supervisor in order to conserve meaningful resources (e.g., support, valuable information) and thus leave the organization?

To find an answer to this question, we introduce the concept of supervisor-initiated turnover (SIT), which constitutes a specific manifestation of voluntary turnover and refers to employees' withdrawal with the aim of joining their supervisor in working for a new employer. SIT intentions (SITI) therefore represent employees' willingness to follow a former supervisor and to take a job at the new organization. Although researchers acknowledge that managers' exit from a firm can produce losses of additional, valuable human capital (Ballinger et al., 2010; Shapiro et al., 2016; Shen & Cannella, 2002) and that such joint turnover exceeds the costs of single turnover instances by far (Porter & Rigby, 2021), SIT and SITI have not yet been studied in HR research, despite their potential to result in substantial losses and negatively affect organizational performance.

As a conceptual framework for our studies, we develop a model of the SIT decision process of employees by drawing on conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). We propose that employees evaluate their available resources they receive from different resource providers before deciding whether to follow their leader or to stay. According to COR theory, employees have a general motivation to protect their important resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Therefore, subordinates who experience a strong relationship with their supervisor may quit and follow their leader to a new organization to avoid losing the resources their supervisor provides. In contrast, prior research often links LMX to increased organizational commitment and employer loyalty and thus decreased turnover intentions

(TI) (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Only a few studies argue that these positive effects may also be fragile, as they are tied to particular leaders (Ballinger et al., 2010; Wayne et al., 1997). Therefore, our aim is to investigate which relational factors are relevant for employees' decisions whether to follow their leader or stay with their current employer and to examine through which mechanisms employees develop SITI in order to determine potential HRM countermeasures. In particular, we intend to study if and how high-quality LMX affects SIT and SITI and which additional relational factors might amplify or counteract this effect.

We address these questions by conducting three complementary studies. In our Pilot study 1, we examine the relationship between LMX and SITI in a field setting with 361 service employees. Study 2 employs an experimental design to replicate and deepen prior findings. We anticipate that supervisor commitment represents an important mediating mechanism which we include to better understand the LMX–SITI relationship. To avoid a potential attitude–behavior gap and to determine further relational drivers of actual SIT, in Study 3, we employ a qualitative approach and interview 46 leader–member dyads that experienced an SIT incident. Overall, our studies elucidate the decision process employees go through in SIT situations and show how LMX can have harmful consequences for organizations in the form of SITI and SIT.

Our work makes a number of theoretical and practical contributions to the literature. First, by reviewing relational turnover theories and by establishing COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) as a valuable and integrative lens for turnover research, we contribute to the growing research stream that builds on COR tenets to examine and explain turnover. Further, we provide profound insights regarding the relational elements that are essential to employees' SIT decisions. Our comprehensive model on the SIT decision process of employees delineates resource evaluation, resource conservation, and resource investment processes that occur prior to employees' SIT. Thus, we provide a novel application context of COR theory and highlight its relevance to HR literature. In particular, we uncover resource conservation processes that occur in social relationships and identify the leader–member relationship, including high-quality LMX and supportive–disloyal leadership behavior (Einarsen et al., 2007), as an important yet understudied explanation for why voluntary turnover, and specifically SIT, increases when supervisors withdraw from organizations. Furthermore, we also identify employees' relational uncertainty regarding the leaders' successor as an antecedent to SIT decisions. Based on our findings, the studies thereby allow the identification of relevant managerial and HRM countermeasures to SIT.

Second, the study contributes to the turnover and HRM literature by introducing an important but understudied facet of voluntary turnover: SIT. Our research identifies LMX and supervisor commitment as important antecedents of SITI and thereby provides new insights into the relational patterns that affect this certain type of voluntary turnover. Our qualitative study further detects team commitment as a relevant SIT-hindering factor while organizational commitment does not emerge as a force that binds employees to their employing organization. Consequently, our study contributes to research on the different

foci of commitment (Vandenberghe et al., 2004) and uncovers their unique effects in SIT situations. In addition, our research contributes to the poaching and lateral hiring research by shedding light on the important role leaders can play in talent acquisition processes through poaching.

Third, we contribute to LMX research by addressing a potential dark side of high-quality LMX relationships. Our studies reveal that beyond the predominant focus on positive outcomes of high-quality LMX relationships, they also pose a risk to organizations. Researchers and HR managers alike encourage leaders to establish good relationships with their subordinates (e.g., Sluss & Thompson, 2012; Walumbwa et al., 2011), but such good intentions might produce negative side effects for organizations. We argue that high-quality LMX represents a salient source of relational resources that members aim to preserve by following their leaders, thereby thwarting other HR initiatives that aim at increasing employee loyalty. We therefore respond to calls for more critical investigations of LMX (Lord et al., 2016).

## 2 | THEORY, MODEL DEVELOPMENT, AND HYPOTHESES

### 2.1 | Review on current relational turnover theories and their implications for SIT

Several turnover theories exist that can inform a relational perspective on turnover (Jo & Ellingson, 2019) and give preliminary insights to the psychological processes related with SIT.

Lee and Mitchell (1994) unfolding model of voluntary turnover, for example, considers relational antecedents of turnover (Jo & Ellingson, 2019). The model posits that critical events or “shocks” cause employees to pause and evaluate the shock's personal meaning and implications and whether leaving is a viable option (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). In this sense, a leaders' exit and his or her subsequent poaching initiative signify “shocks” that force employees to deliberately decide whether to leave or to stay (Li et al., 2020).

Similarly, Maertz and Griffeth's (2004) framework of eight motivational forces of turnover suggests that critical events trigger conscious deliberations and create motivational forces to either stay with or leave the current organization. One of these eight distinct motives, which seems especially relevant in the SIT context, are constituent forces which involve an employee's relationships with individuals or groups within the organization (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). Based on Reichers' (1985) notion that employees build distinct commitments to different constituents within an organization beyond organizational commitment, the eight forces framework holds that employee attachment to a constituent may turn into a pulling force that leads the employee to quit if that constituent exits the organization (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). Hence, a leader, who acts as an important constituent, prompts employees to evaluate their own options when (s)he leaves the organization.

The job embeddedness model (Mitchell et al., 2001) takes a closer look on how the structure of social relationships impacts retention

and thus diminishes turnover. It suggests that employees who possess many “links” to others in their organization will feel “stuck” in it and thus refrain from quitting as doing so would require breaking or undermining valued relationships (Jo & Ellingson, 2019; Mitchell et al., 2001). Research that incorporates a social network perspective to turnover literature employs network analytical approaches to examine network properties and the structure of those links (in social network research referred to as “ties”) (Soltis et al., 2013). Social network scholars build on social capital theory and argue that social ties to other people within the workplace provide access to valued resources (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Soltis et al., 2013). Scholars differentiate between strong and weak ties depending on the time, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal services of the relationship (Granovetter, 1973; Soltis et al., 2018). In this sense, a high-quality LMX relationship between employees and their leaders can be considered as an important strong tie characterized by trust, reciprocity, and friendship-like features (Nelson, 1989) that embeds the employee in the organization. Conversely, a quitting high-quality LMX leader signals the risk of losing resources as the relationship to him or her acts as a main source of support and as the foundation of social capital development in the employees' work life (Harris et al., 2011; Kim, 2019; Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018).

The turnover contagion model (Felps et al., 2009) contends that employees tend to imitate the withdraw behavior they observe in interactions with other individuals. Porter and Rigby (2021) provide an integrative review of the turnover contagion process and suggest that its perspective can be extended by considering how leaders' turnover affects employees' organizational attachment. In their conceptual deliberations they suggest that “higher quality” departing leaders might increase subordinates' likelihood of turnover. They propose that this effect might be rooted in the change of subordinates' access to workplace resources arising from leaders' departure (Porter & Rigby, 2021).

### 2.2 | A unifying lens for turnover research and SIT: COR theory

This brief overview on relational turnover theories highlights that most of them explicitly or implicitly take employees' evaluation of resource access into account when predicting their turnover decisions. Similarly, Jo and Ellingson (2019) emphasize that a consistent theme across the relational turnover literature is the notion of resource investment. We therefore believe that COR theory and its fundamental tenets, which build on individuals' motivation to protect and acquire resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014), provide a valuable lens for turnover research. It offers insights in underlying processes related to turnover and unifies them within a parsimonious theoretical frame. Hence, COR theory enables us to identify key antecedents and mediating mechanisms to employees' decision to stay or quit their employer (Kiazad et al., 2015) and likewise to SIT. A small but nascent research stream already starts to build on COR theory to explain turnover processes. For example, in their multi-foci model of job

embeddedness, Kiazad et al. (2015) incorporate a COR perspective and state that employees stay at their current job to retain valued resources as resource loss is distressing. Jo and Ellingson (2019) also develop a comprehensive model of the relational context of turnover by drawing on COR theory. They emphasize that employees repeatedly assess whether social relationships are worthwhile and that they take actions either to preserve resource-rich relationships or to extract themselves from resource-poor relationships (Jo & Ellingson, 2019). However, although current efforts to incorporate COR theory's tenets already advance turnover research, they do not consider the tensions and psychological processes that occur within employees when a valued resource-providing leader leaves the organization. Furthermore, current COR-based turnover research is overwhelmingly limited to conceptual deliberations and does not provide necessary empirical evidence (Porter & Rigby, 2021). Therefore, we develop a comprehensive SIT-framework which builds on COR theory and test its proposed relationships empirically.

### 2.3 | COR-based model of the SIT decision process

From a COR perspective, various persons and entities employees interact with can represent sources that provide them with valuable resources (including their leader and their employing organization with its related HRM practices). The value individuals assign to these resources is not invariant but changes over time (Halbesleben et al., 2014). This implies that employees occasionally evaluate their resources and assign subjective values to them and the social relationships that act as resource sources in the organizational environment. Based on this evaluation, they develop motivations to acquire or protect resources they value and thus engage in resource acquisition, resource loss prevention, and resource recovery. Leaders provide valued resources, such as knowledge, better roles, and personal mentoring, to their favored subordinates (Harris et al., 2011; Liden et al., 1997; Shapiro et al., 2016). We therefore focus on the quality of the LMX relationship in our SIT decision model because we consider employees' evaluation of their relationship with, and the resources obtained from the leader critical to their decision of whether to leave their organization and follow their leader. When it comes to acquiring and maximizing personally valuable resources through the leader-member relationship, it is also important to consider a dark, conspirational side of leadership as leadership behaviors considered as negative have a substantial effect on employee outcomes (Ertz et al., 2022; Itzkovich et al., 2020). Such behavior, termed supportive-disloyal leadership behavior (Eisenberger et al., 2010), has shown surprisingly high prevalence rates when comparing destructive leadership behaviors (Aasland et al., 2010). It is defined as a "dyadic deviant behavior that contradicts established organizational rules, in which supervisor and subordinate are aware of its deviance and simultaneously benefit from it socially or economically" (Ertz et al., 2022). Supportive-disloyal leadership behavior thus involves leaders' consideration of their subordinates' well-being at the expense of organizational goal attainment by providing them with (more) resources than

they are obliged to (Einarsen et al., 2007). We assume that employees include their leaders' supportive-disloyal leadership behavior in their resource evaluation relevant to SIT, as it promises to be a source of additional resources over and above those gained through LMX.

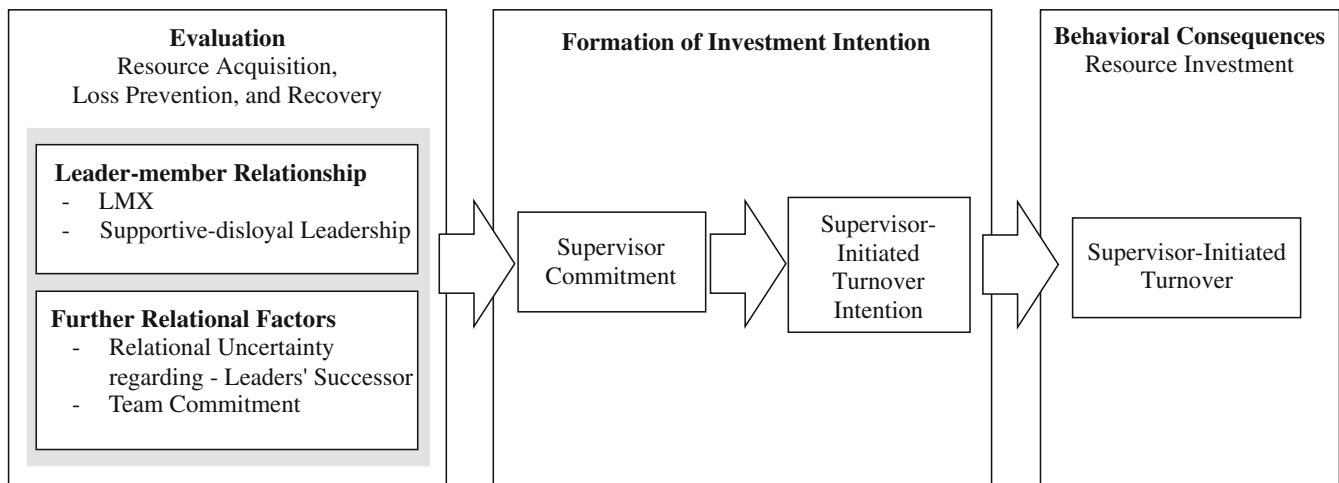
Our COR-based model on the SIT decision process further proposes that employees develop resource investment intentions (i.e., employees' willingness and strategies to invest resources to conserve or acquire new resources) based on their evaluation of resources and their expectations of a future (albeit uncertain) flow of benefits (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Two major principles of COR theory serve to explain this process—the primacy of resource loss and the principle of resource investment (Halbesleben et al., 2014). The latter emphasizes that individuals must invest resources to gain resources or to protect themselves against the risk of resource losses. To this end, they "develop decision and investment strategies to determine the payoff they will receive for resource investment" (Hobfoll, 2001). We identify supervisor commitment as a substantial element of such investment strategy and therefore include it in our SIT decision process model. We assume that employees invest their commitment to their leader based on their perception of obtaining valuable resources in return. In situations where the leader with whom employees developed a high-quality LMX relationship leaves the organization and offers a job, employees might be forced to choose between the resource-providing leader and their current employer. According to the second major principal of COR theory, the primacy of resource loss, losing resources is more detrimental to employees than similar gains are perceived helpful (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Therefore, the impending loss of a valued resource activates a motivation to act to avoid that loss or to utilize resource optimization strategies (Hobfoll, 2001). We therefore contend that if employees perceive the termination of the LMX relationship as a more severe resource loss than losing resources provided by the organization and its HRM practices, they will develop intentions to follow their leader and leave their employing organization. We further contend that the development of investment intentions is followed by behavioral consequences, that is, the process described above might motivate employees to follow their leader. Figure 1 summarizes our theoretical model of the SIT decision process.

Our hypothesis development focuses on the first two stages of our SIT decision model. The investigation of the behavioral consequences is part of our supplementary qualitative study.

### 2.4 | Direct path from LMX to SIT

We define SIT as an attitudinal concept that differs from general TI in that it refers not only to withdrawal but rather a willingness to follow a supervisor to a new organization, making the TI contingent on the supervisor. Because of this contingency, SIT differs from personal loyalty because it indicates enticement efforts by supervisors who actively pursue former subordinates, encouraging them to change jobs.

Supervisors develop unique relationships with subordinates that differ in quality (i.e., lower to higher; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). That



**FIGURE 1** Conservation of resources (COR)-based model of the supervisor-initiated (SIT) decision process

quality in turn depends on the exchange of valued resources within these relationships (Liden et al., 1997; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). Employees in high-quality LMX relationships receive more interpersonal resources from their supervisors (e.g., social and emotional support, career advancement, valuable information; Liden et al., 1997) and also contribute more to the relationship than do subordinates in low-quality exchanges (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). In line with COR theory, we predict that subordinates perceive such relationships as a main source of work resources (Halbesleben, 2006; Harris et al., 2011) that enables them to perform better (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). However, high-quality LMX relationships might also pose a risk to organizations if supervisors leave because the resources that employees obtained from the relationship vanish with the leader. In line with the primacy of resource loss (Halbesleben et al., 2014), subordinates might evaluate this loss as more important to their social capital than the chance to gain similarly valued resources (e.g., a high-quality LMX relationship with the supervisor's successor, or individually beneficial HRM practices). Therefore, based on their evaluation, subordinates might develop a strong intention to engage in behaviors to avoid resource loss (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Preserving the relationship with the focal supervisor represents the most proximal and promising course of action, so subordinates develop a willingness to follow their leader. Formally,

**Hypothesis 1.** *LMX has a positive direct effect on SIT.*

## 2.5 | The role of supervisor commitment

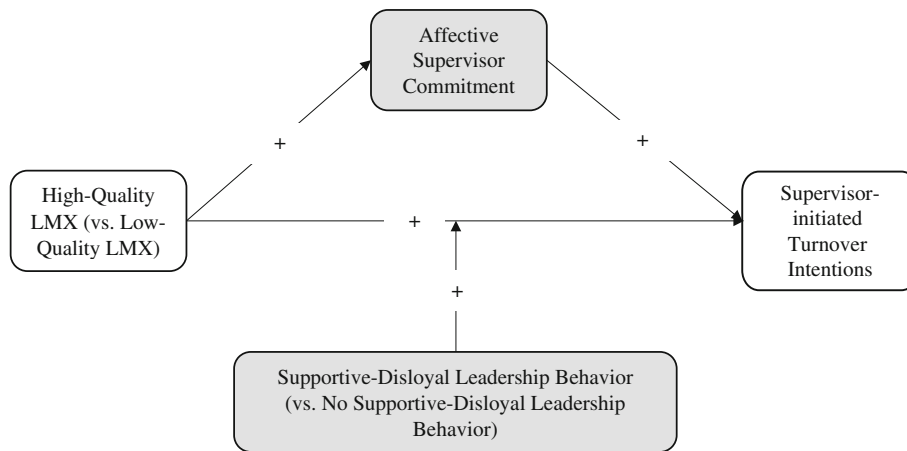
As stated above, we suggest that employees' affective attachment to their leader is an important element of their resource investment strategies in SIT situations. In general, the investment of commitment represents a relevant element in relationship strategies (Hobfoll, 2001). We argue that employees perceive high-quality LMX relationships as a key source of resources in the

organizational environment. This perception fosters emotional attachment to their immediate supervisor (Walumbwa et al., 2011). Further, their leaders' withdrawal and job offer in SIT situations force employees to decide whether to stay or to follow. This decision implies either the loss of organizational and HRM-provided or supervisor-related resources. COR theory proposes that individuals strategically invest in resources (Singh et al., 2017); that is, they should weigh which option provides more valuable resources. The strategy to invest in their commitment to their supervisor promises to conserve the resources provided by this source. Therefore, we suggest that the investment in affective commitment to their supervisor directly affects employees' intentions to accept their leaders' job offer.

**Hypothesis 2.** *Supervisor commitment mediates the relationship between LMX and SIT, such that (a) LMX increases supervisor commitment, (b) supervisor commitment positively relates to SIT, and therefore (c) LMX has a positive indirect effect on SIT through supervisor commitment.*

## 2.6 | Moderating role of supportive-disloyal leadership behavior

In our COR-based SIT decision model, we identified supportive-disloyal leadership behavior as a further leader-member relationship related aspect that employees consider in their resource evaluation. The rationale behind this assumption is that subordinates benefit extraordinarily from this leadership behavior and receive valuable and unique resources. Basically, subordinates in high-quality LMX relationships likely receive special privileges and career-enhancing opportunities from supervisors (Wang et al., 2005) that are in line with the rules of the organization (e.g., for the purpose of motivation). However, supervisors also might grant more or different benefits to preferred



**FIGURE 2** Conceptual model in the Pilot Study (Study 1) and Study 2. Colored boxes refer only to Study 2

followers in a misuse of organizational resources (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Such supportive-disloyal leadership behavior involves pro-subordinate behavior that concurrently violates the legitimate interests of the organization (Einarsen et al., 2007). For example, supervisors may allow in-group employees to work reduced hours but still receive full pay or to take work supplies home for personal use (Ertz et al., 2022). Anti-organizational leadership behavior might be especially prevalent when leaders already think about quitting and therefore are less concerned with complying with organizational rules. Although distinct from LMX, supportive-disloyal leadership behavior might co-occur with it and thus affect the effect of LMX on SIT. In a climate that fosters good relationships, leaders might try to ensure the well-being of their subordinates and their own benefits by misusing organizational resources. Subordinates who benefit from such supportive-disloyal leadership behavior are usually aware of their privileges (Ertz et al., 2022). Because of the illegitimate aspect, they also recognize that the benefits they obtain from supportive-disloyal leadership will vanish with the leader and that similar benefits are unlikely to continue with a new supervisor in the current organization. Returning to COR theory and the primacy of resource loss, joining the supervisors' new organization promises conservation of these privileges and resources. Thus, the presence of supportive-disloyal leadership behavior should amplify perceived resource losses and enhance the impact of LMX on SIT.

**Hypothesis 3.** *Supportive-disloyal leadership behavior moderates the direct effect between LMX and SIT, such that the relationship is stronger for employees exposed to supportive-disloyal leadership behavior by their supervisor.*

Figure 2 displays the conceptual model of Studies 1 and 2.

We test our COR-based model on the SIT decision process with three complementary studies. First, our Pilot Study (Study 1) examines the main effect between LMX and SIT. Study 2 focuses on evaluating the leader-member relationship and the employee's development of investment intentions. Study 3 takes an exploratory approach to investigate which contextual factors in addition to the leader-member relationship promote or hinder actual SIT.

### 3 | PILOT STUDY (STUDY 1)

#### 3.1 | Methods

To analyze the effect of LMX on employees' SIT in an actual work environment, we conducted a cross-sectional survey of German employees. We recruited participants through business and career social networks that span various industries and asked them to take an online survey. After excluding self-employed respondents (i.e., they did not have a direct supervisor), we obtained 361 usable responses. This sample consisted of 64.3% women, and the average age was 31.9 (SD = 8.05); 32.1% of the participants had worked for their supervisor for 1–3 years, 22.2% had working relationships of 3–5 years, and 15.5% reported a tenure of more than 5 years.

#### 3.2 | Measures

##### 3.2.1 | Leader-member exchange

The quality of the dyadic relationship was measured using six items from the Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) scale ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) collected from subordinates' perspectives. The scale used a five-point format. One sample item asked "How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs?"

##### 3.2.2 | SIT intentions

Because a measure of SIT does not exist, we applied a scale development procedure and created a measure to test our theoretical model. We tested our measure's validity, reliability, and nomological network. In Appendix A, we describe our scale development process in detail. Using a five-item measure, employees indicated their SIT ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ). One sample item is "I would be ready to leave my current employer if my supervisor offered me a job in his or her new organization." The five-point Likert-type scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to

5 (strongly agree). The complete measure and its standardized factor loadings are shown in Table B1.

### 3.2.3 | Control variable

We further controlled for general TI to avoid confounding effects that could inflate the effect of LMX on SITI. Respondents rated their general TI using five items developed by Wayne et al. (1997).

## 3.3 | Analysis and results

We employed partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling (SEM) in SmartPLS 3 (Ringle et al., 2015) to investigate Hypothesis 1. PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for research that aims to extend theory, while covariance-based SEM is more appropriate when prior theory is strong (Hair et al., 2011). However, to leverage the strengths of both approaches and establish conservative measures, we employed a covariance-based approach to assess the psychometric qualities of our measures, but we used PLS-SEM to test the structural model.

Using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in AMOS 24, we examined the dimensionality of the three factors representing LMX, SITI, and general TI, as detailed in Table C1. The chi-square difference tests revealed that the three-factor model fit the data well (ratio  $\chi^2/df = 2.12$ , CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.06) and better than all other alternative models. Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability values, and correlations; they exceed common thresholds and thus indicate composite reliability and convergent validity. We also examined whether the square roots of the AVE were higher than any construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981); the results confirm acceptable discriminant validity.

We followed Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) recommendations and applied several methods to reduce the risk of common method variance (CMV) (e.g., different scale anchors). Furthermore, we tested for CMV using Lindell and Whitney's (2001) marker variable procedure and compared the de facto correlations table with a marker-corrected correlations table. Following Simmering et al. (2015), we employed creative self-efficacy as a marker variable and measured it with a two-item scale borrowed from Tierney and Farmer (2011). We selected the lowest positive correlation of the marker with all other variables ( $r_s = 0.027$ , with general TI) to adjust the correlations and then

estimated their statistical significance. All statistically significant zero-order correlations remained significant. Therefore, common method bias does not appear to bias our findings.

We used a bootstrap procedure with 10,000 resamples to assess path significance; the SRMR value of 0.05 indicates acceptable model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The results of the PLS-SEM analysis support Hypothesis 1 by showing that LMX has a positive effect on SITI ( $\beta = 0.56$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ) while controlling for general TI.

## 3.4 | Discussion

Our Pilot Study (Study 1) provides evidence, consistent with Hypothesis 1 and our theoretical framework, that LMX increases SITI. Therefore, employees' evaluation of their LMX relationship and the corresponding resources obtained are important predictors of employees' decision to quit and follow their leader. However, with Study 1, we do not investigate the underlying psychological mechanism that induces the formation of investment intentions based on employees' resource evaluation. In addition, Study 1 uses a cross-sectional design, which supports only limited causal inferences. To overcome these shortcomings, Study 2 features an experimental design, with supervisor commitment included as a mediator. Furthermore, we account for supervisors' supportive-disloyal leadership behavior, as we expect pro-subordinate but anti-organizational leadership behaviors to interact with LMX in affecting SITI.

## 4 | STUDY 2

### 4.1 | Sample and procedures

We employed a scenario-based approach to examine the hypothesized effects and mechanisms. We used a scenario-based experiment with a 2 (LMX: high-quality vs. low-quality)  $\times$  2 (supportive-disloyal leadership behavior: present vs. absent) between-subject factorial design. The online data collection process included recruiting participants from a hospitality social media site in Germany. A restaurant setting provides the study context because we note the relatively high turnover in this sector (Yang & Wan, 2004), and we sought to ensure that participants could easily imagine the provided scenario. Therefore, we recruited participants familiar with working in a restaurant setting. After excluding those who had never worked in the hospitality

**TABLE 1** Study 1 statistics ( $n = 361$ )

Construct	M	SD	AVE	CR	1	2	3
LMX	3.62	0.86	0.60	0.90	<b>0.77</b>		
SITI	2.26	1.08	0.68	0.91	0.50**	<b>0.82</b>	
TI	3.30	2.03	0.76	0.94	-0.57**	-0.07	<b>0.87</b>

Note: Bolded numbers on the diagonal represent the square root of the average variance extracted.

Abbreviations: LMX, leader-member exchange; SITI, supervisor-initiated turnover intention; TI, turnover intention.

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .



industry, we randomly assigned the participants to four groups. Among the sample of 247 usable responses, 68.8% came from women. The average age was 32.5 (SD = 11.5); 48.2% worked in a restaurant, 36.4% worked in a hotel with a restaurant, and 15.4% did not currently work in the hospitality sector but had relevant prior professional experience.

The scenario described a hypothetical relationship with a supervisor and the overall working situation. A sample scenario is provided in Table D1. To manipulate LMX, we relied on Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) LMX scale and adapted five items to describe the participants' relationship with their supervisor as either a high-quality or a low-quality LMX relationship. We then manipulated supportive-disloyal leadership behavior by describing the supervisor's work behavior toward the participants. After reading the scenarios, all participants indicated their perceptions of supervisor commitment, and their SITI. The questionnaire also contained manipulation and realism checks, as well as control variables.

## 4.2 | Measures

### 4.2.1 | Supervisor commitment

We measured supervisor commitment using a slightly adapted version of the scale ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ) developed by Vandenberghe et al. (2004). Responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A sample item is "My supervisor would mean a lot to me."

### 4.2.2 | SIT intention

We used our self-developed scale (5 items;  $\alpha = 0.90$ ) from Study 1 to assess SITI, although we used subjunctive verb forms in the items, such as "I would be ready to leave my current employer if my supervisor offered me a job in her new organization." The responses were measured on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

### 4.2.3 | Controls

As control variables, we included a multi-item scale for affective organizational commitment to account for the possible different foci of

commitment (Vandenberghe et al., 2004) and mean scores on Strahan and Gerbasi's (1972) short social desirability scale.

## 4.3 | Analysis and results

### 4.3.1 | Manipulation, realism, and complexity checks

The manipulation of LMX was effective. In the high-quality LMX condition, we asked participants whether their relationship with their supervisor was very good, and in the low-quality condition, we asked them whether their relationship with their supervisor was very bad (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). We then reverse-scaled the low-quality condition and compared the means which differed significantly ( $M_{\text{High}} = 5.83$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ;  $M_{\text{Low}} = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ;  $t = 11.81$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ). A similar procedure checked the supportive-disloyal leadership behavior manipulation. In the supportive-disloyal leadership behavior present condition, participants had to indicate whether their fictitious supervisor sometimes provided them with privileges that were not authorized by the management. In the absent condition, we asked whether their supervisor always tried to comply with management's standards. After reverse scaling the absent condition, we compared means, which differed significantly ( $M_{\text{Present}} = 5.21$ ,  $SD = 2.17$ ;  $M_{\text{Absent}} = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 2.23$ ;  $t = 8.01$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ). Furthermore, our scenario appeared realistic to the respondents (seven-point scale,  $M_{\text{Realism}} = 4.91$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ), and respondents could easily imagine being in the described situation, according to the results of the complexity check (seven-point scale,  $M_{\text{Complexity}} = 5.59$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ).

### 4.3.2 | Main results

To assess convergent and discriminant validity, we conducted a CFA in AMOS 24. Table 2 contains the means, standard deviations, AVE, composite reliability, and correlations. All multi-item constructs (i.e., supervisor commitment, SITI, and organizational commitment) exhibit convergent validity, according to the factor loadings. We also found support for discriminant validity using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion.

To test our hypothesized model, we followed Wagner et al. (2009) and started with the direct effects of LMX on supervisor commitment and SITI. As recommended by Bagozzi et al. (1991), we then tested the whole model with PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 3 (Ringle et al., 2015).

Construct	M	SD	AVE	CR	1	2	3
Supervisor commitment	4.21	1.83	0.76	0.95	<b>0.87</b>		
SITI	2.22	1.05	0.66	0.90	0.72**	<b>0.81</b>	<b>0.88</b>
Affective organizational commitment	4.20	1.69	0.78	0.96	0.80**	0.57**	

TABLE 2 Study 2 statistics ( $n = 247$ )

Note: Bolded numbers on the diagonal represent the square root of the average variance extracted.

Abbreviation: SITI, supervisor-initiated turnover intention.

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

To analyze the direct effects of high-quality (vs. low-quality) LMX relationships on SIT (Hypothesis 1) and supervisor commitment (Hypothesis 2a), we employed two-tailed *t* tests. We found that SIT are significantly higher for the high-quality LMX group ( $M_{\text{High}} = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ;  $M_{\text{Low}} = 1.62$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ;  $t = 10.07$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), which again supports Hypothesis 1. Compared with the level in response to low-quality LMX, supervisor commitment was also significantly higher in the high-quality LMX group ( $M_{\text{High}} = 5.31$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ;  $M_{\text{Low}} = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ;  $t = 12.90$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 2a is supported.

To analyze the hypothesized path coefficients, we employed PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 3 (Ringle et al., 2015) using a bootstrap procedure with 10,000 resamples to assess their significance. Table 3 contains the PLS results. We transformed the grouping variable into two dummy variables and used their interaction to derive three dummy variables, with low-quality LMX and supportive-disloyal leadership behavior absent as the reference category. Thus, we could analyze the effects of LMX, depending on the presence of supportive-disloyal leadership behavior. The SRMR value of 0.05 indicates acceptable model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The direct effect of supervisor commitment on SIT is positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.53$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), as we predicted in Hypothesis 2b.

Next, we analyzed the hypothesized indirect effects. Mediated by supervisor commitment, the indirect effect of LMX on SIT is positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), which supports Hypothesis 2c.

Finally, we investigated the moderating effect of the presence (vs. absence) of supportive-disloyal leadership behavior on the effect of high-quality (vs. low-quality) LMX on SIT. We found a slightly significant effect of the interaction term of LMX quality and supportive-disloyal leadership behavior on SIT ( $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ), in line with Hypothesis 3. The model explains 50% of the variance in SIT, and 69% of the variance in supervisor commitment.

## 4.4 | Discussion

Study 2 provides further support regarding the risks associated with LMX for organizations by replicating the positive effect of LMX on SIT, thus supporting Hypothesis 1. Furthermore, it provides insights on the underlying psychological mechanism in terms of supervisor commitment. We also found an interaction effect of LMX and supportive-disloyal leadership behavior on SIT. Thus, the presence of supportive-disloyal leadership behavior seems to enhance the perception of an impending resource loss in cases when the leader withdraws and motivates employees to develop intentions to follow their leader. Although the results of Studies 1 and 2 facilitate a better understanding of the SIT phenomenon, we can gain greater insights by exploring actual SIT behavior.

## 5 | STUDY 3

We conducted an ad hoc qualitative study with participants (leaders and members) who experienced SIT incidents. Our main objective was to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the relational aspects that were relevant for employees' decision to follow their leader or stay with the organization and thus to identify relational factors that either promoted or prevented their SIT decision.

### 5.1 | Procedure and research participants

The participants comprised leader-member dyads where the leader had withdrawn from the initial organization and then offered the former follower a job with the new employer. We decided to include both dyads where the follower accepted the offer (case 1) and dyads where the follower refused the offer and decided to stay with the initial organization (case 2). With this approach, we aimed to gain deeper insights into the relational drivers of employees' SIT decisions by interviewing followers and their leaders. Because subordinates,

**TABLE 3** Study 2: PLS results

Determinants	Path coeff.	t-Values	R <sup>2</sup>
Effects on supervisor commitment			0.69
High-quality LMX vs. low-quality LMX	0.35**	7.43	
Affective organizational commitment (control)	0.60**	13.10	
Social desirability (control)	0.01	0.29	
Effects on SIT			0.50
High-quality LMX vs. low-quality LMX	0.18*	2.40	
Supervisor commitment	0.53**	5.82	
High-quality LMX × supportive-disloyal leadership behavior	0.09†	1.84	
Affective organizational commitment	0.05	0.61	
Social desirability (control)	-0.09*	1.88	

Abbreviations: LMX, leader-member exchange; SIT, supervisor-initiated turnover intention.

† $p < 0.10$ .

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

supervisors, and the respective organizations or their HRM departments, respectively, often perceive poaching and SIT as delicate topics, researchers face strong reticence to self-disclosure. Therefore, we used a snowball sampling technique to identify participants. A group of 16 students who attended a course on leadership and qualitative research methods at a university in Germany recruited working people who had been part of an SIT dyad, either in the subordinate or in the supervisor role, from a variety of industries, such as banking and insurance, hospitality, healthcare, consulting, and automotive. Identified participants then named their SIT dyad counterpart. The interviews started with a topic introduction and by asking the participants to describe the SIT incident from their perspective. Next, we requested subordinates to explain the reasons they decided to follow their supervisor (case 1) or to stay with their then employer (case 2). We then asked them to describe their relationship with their supervisor prior to the SIT incident and how this relationship affected their turnover decision. Finally, we asked them to respond to the Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) LMX scale. The five-point Likert-scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). When interviewing supervisors, we followed a similar line of questioning but with regard to their relationship with their follower instead. We conducted the separate leader and follower interviews face-to-face or via telephone and online communication software (Skype). We obtained 110 interviews (55 dyads) but decided to remove nine dyads due to insufficient congruence with our conceptualization of SIT incidents (e.g., turnover because of bankruptcy of the then employer) or inferior quality of the interview after reviewing the corresponding tape recordings and transcripts. Therefore, our final sample comprised 92 interviews with 46 dyads (case 1 = 35 dyads, case 2 = 11 dyads). The interview length ranged from 9 to 29 min.

## 5.2 | Analysis

We analyzed the data using an exploratory, thematic analytic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) employing template analysis (King, 2004). Template analysis is an iterative process that serves to identify (hierarchical) themes (or codes) that organize, describe, and support the interpretation of the data (King, 2004). We started by creating an initial template that comprised two broad first-order themes, SIT-promoting factors and SIT-hindering factors, reflecting our research objective. We then worked systematically through the verbatim interview transcripts to add inductive codes to capture themes as they emerged from the data (King, 2004). Next, the authors jointly reviewed and discussed the resulting second template and refined the hierarchical structure and labels until a full description of the data was achieved.

To ensure the reliability of our findings, two independent judges used the template to code the verbatim data of 20 randomly selected interviews (10 dyads; 21% of the sample), which exceeds the recommended amount of 10% of the sample to achieve representativeness (Lombard et al., 2002). Calculated using Perreault and Leigh' (1989) index of reliability, the inter-judge reliability score was 0.93, thus exceeding the recommended 0.70 threshold (Rust & Cooil, 1994).

Table 4 shows the final template. While higher-order codes represent broader themes in the data, lower levels correspond to more specific themes within broader domains (Martinaityte & Sacramento, 2013). We identified four second-order codes, that is, relational factors, organizational factors, career perspectives, and personal perceptions. Due to our aim to identify relational antecedents to SIT, we focus on the relational factors in the description of our key findings.

## 5.3 | Findings and discussion

Overall, the findings match and complement the results of Studies 1 and 2, particularly regarding the process of resource evaluation. First, they further support our main hypothesis that LMX quality is a key factor that influences the SITs and behavior of followers. The average LMX score of all participants (leaders and members) was 4.25 (minimum = 3.17; maximum = 5.0), so all participants were members of high-quality LMX dyads. During the interviews, all participants,

**TABLE 4** Study 3: Coding template

First-order codes	Second-order codes	Third-order codes
SIT-promoting factors	<b>Relational factors; Uncertainty regarding leaders' successor</b>	
	Organizational factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizational changes</li> <li>Organizational climate</li> <li>Upper management</li> <li>Product/service quality</li> <li>Location</li> </ul>
	Career perspectives regarding the prospective employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pay improvement</li> <li>Promotion</li> <li>Development</li> <li>New challenges</li> </ul>
	Personal perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General dissatisfaction</li> </ul>
SIT-hindering factors	<b>Relational factors; Team commitment</b>	
	Organizational factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contractual constraints</li> <li>Location</li> </ul>
	Career perspectives regarding the current employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pay improvement</li> <li>Promotion</li> <li>Development</li> </ul>
	Personal perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need for security</li> </ul>

Abbreviation: SIT, supervisor-initiated turnover.

members, and leaders alike highlighted that one central reason they made or accepted an SIT job offer was their good leader–member relationship that was characterized by mutual trust, effective cooperation, loyalty, and a sense of responsibility for each other. However, the qualitative data also shed light on further relational resources and perceived risks employees consider during their resource evaluation on which their final SIT decision is based.

Several participating employees who decided to follow their leader mentioned feelings of uncertainty and risk they perceived when their leaders announced the decision to quit and offered a new job to them. The following quote (member 3) reflects this feeling of uncertainty: “*You start to wonder when your leader decides to leave the company. What happens in the background that I don't know about, especially when you know your leader for a long time? You start to wonder what the new boss will be like, how will we get along with each other?*” A second exemplary quote (member 28) pictures the effects this successor-related uncertainty causes regarding the attachment and attitudes toward the organization: “*In the end, your leader is your contact person, everything regarding projects and the work is related to the leader. Of course, it is uncertain who the new leader will be. Consequently, my whole attitude towards the firm changed and also towards my work*”. These empirical findings match prior conceptual deliberations, for example, Shapiro et al.'s (2016) relational process model on the development of subordinates' organizational attachment following leaders' departure in which they suggest that employees perceive the risk to lose many valued resources that leaders directly or indirectly control. Consequently, employees envision resource losses in consequence of leaders' departures according to COR theory. They further reason that a subordinate who loses a leader knows “that the next leader can potentially change the distribution of the subordinate's valued resources or the procedures for determining and delivering resources” (Shapiro et al., 2016). Our findings reveal that these feelings of uncertainty and perceived risk especially emerge in the SIT context and therefore are likely to impact employees' decision to follow their leader.

In contrast, members who refused the leader's offer noted that their current team was important to them as the following quote (member 11) illustrates: “*One reason against it, for example, was that I felt very comfortable in my current team. [...] The measures of my firm were less responsible for my decision, but as I said, the team in which I worked.*” Hence, their team commitment affected the decision to stay with their then employer. Thus, the work team seems to act as an important resource that reduces SIT. What is striking is the fact that not one of the employees did refer to feelings of attachment to their current organization as a factor that could have reduced their SIT although previous research contends that employees show organizational commitment as a response to receiving organizational resources (e.g., Boon & Kalshoven, 2014). These findings enrich prior relational research in shedding light on the importance to distinguish not only between supervisor and organizational commitment, but also to differentiate between commitment to the team and the organization. Shapiro et al. (2016), for example, subsume identification to work groups and organizational

networks under collective organizational identification when developing their relational process model. However, our study reveals that it seems important to explicitly distinguish the commitments to different foci to obtain insights to employees' SIT decisions.

Overall, the interview findings enrich the results of Studies 1 and 2 by illuminating further relational factors that are relevant to employees' SIT decisions. By identifying SIT-promoting and SIT-hindering relational factors, the study extends our understanding of employees' evaluation of resources. These results help to identify relevant organizational countermeasures that can be adopted by HR managers, which we will discuss below.

## 6 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

By taking a relational perspective and introducing the SIT concept, this article addresses the phenomenon of joint leader–member turnover which despite its detrimental effects for HRM has received negligible attention so far. To comprehensively investigate the antecedents and processes that contribute to employees' decisions whether to follow their leader or stay with their current organization, we developed an SIT decision model based on COR theory. We tested our model with a multi-method approach, employing quantitative and qualitative methods. First, we identified the leader–member relationship as a relevant antecedent of SIT. Whereas much of the literature points to the positive outcomes of high-quality LMX relationships (e.g., Dulebohn et al., 2012), our findings indicate that they can also pose a risk to organizations. Second, we examined the formation of resource investment intentions by considering the mediating role of supervisor commitment leading to SIT. Third, we identified further relational factors that act as SIT-promoting and SIT-hindering forces during resource evaluation. These findings yield meaningful implications for theory and HRM practice.

### 6.1 | Theoretical implications

Our research makes three main theoretical contributions to the organizational behavior and HRM literature. First, we establish COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) as a valuable, integrative lens for turnover research and thereby contribute to a small but growing HRM-related research stream that builds on COR tenets to explain turnover and to unify extant themes in turnover literature. By applying a relational perspective drawing on COR theory, this study also advances a new understanding of resource conservation processes occurring in social relationships within organizations. Our model reveals the relevance of resource evaluation as an important antecedent to the formation of resource investment intentions and actual resource investment. Based on the evaluation of valued resources, individuals become motivated to conserve, acquire, or invest resources. By unraveling this complex process in the context of SIT and by developing a process model based on COR theory, we offer a new application, extend COR theory, and highlight COR theory's relevance to turnover and HR literature.

We highlight the leader–follower relationship as an important source of resources within the organizational context. Some existing studies have investigated resource conservation processes in LMX relationships (e.g., Harris et al., 2011). However, they focus on examining processes that benefit the organization. Our study illustrates that the two major principles of COR theory, the primacy of resource loss and the principle of resource investment (Halbesleben et al., 2014), motivate employees to follow a valuable source of resources, even if this involves relinquishing organizational resources and HRM-provided resources such as career perspectives. In this context, we further identified supportive–disloyal leadership behavior, a harmful phenomenon that has virtually been neglected in organizational research, as a relevant element of the leader–member relationship that enhances the effect of LMX on employees' intentions to follow their leader. We also uncovered further relational factors that either promote or hinder SIT. Overall, our study demonstrates the utility of COR theory as a conceptual framework for explicating the occurrence of the SIT phenomenon. Moreover, our study also contributes to COR theory and prior research that examines how individuals make investment decisions. Our results underpin findings that investment decisions are based on relationship-related factors (Halbesleben et al., 2014). However, the findings go beyond extant work by turning the focus especially on the leader–subordinate relationship and its significance to investment decisions.

Second, we contribute to the turnover literature by introducing SIT as an important manifestation of voluntary turnover and SITI as a specific form of TI. Although organizations clearly suffer if supervisors leave and entice valued employees away (Jones, 1989) and SIT thus is an important HR-relevant outcome, this phenomenon has not been addressed in existing HRM literature. By empirically examining the impact of LMX and supervisor commitment on SITI, we provide new insights into the relational patterns that effect SITI. Our qualitative study gives further hints regarding other types of commitments relevant in the SIT decision process. While several participants who refused their leader's offer mentioned their commitment to the team as a reason to stay with the current employer, none of them referred to organizational commitment as a binding force. That is, contrary to previous research (e.g., Meyer et al., 2002), our findings suggest that employees' emotional attachment to their organization does not prevent them from leaving the organization if their valued supervisors switch to another employer. Thus, our study contributes to research on the different foci of commitment (Vandenberghe et al., 2004) that suggests employees can develop separate commitments to more “proximal” entities such as supervisors and teams and more “distal” ones such as the organization with its HRM practices. Thereby, our findings reveal how important it is to distinguish between team and organizational commitment. Furthermore, it highlights the relevance of employees' perceived uncertainty following leaders' departure. In addition to contributing to turnover literature, our study also provides insights to the related poaching and lateral hiring research (e.g., Whysall et al., 2019). While extant research predominantly has focused on the attributes and behaviors of the target employee, the current employer, and the potential employer (e.g., Amankwah-

Amoah, 2015), our findings shed light on the key role leaders can play in talent acquisition processes through poaching.

Finally, our research contributes to the LMX literature by revealing boundaries to the conventional wisdom that high-quality LMX relationships always benefit organizations. Most literature touts the benefits of LMX (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Gerstner & Day, 1997); few studies address its potential negative outcomes. As exceptions, Greenbaum et al. (2018) have found that employees who have a high-quality LMX relationship with their leader are more likely to mimic their leader's unethical conduct. Ballinger et al. (2010) show that employees with high-quality LMX perceive a leadership change as a substantial shock that creates negative affect and induces them to quit. We also suggest that high-quality LMX has the potential to harm organizations; however, we take a different perspective. We suggest that LMX provides an important source of resources for employees that triggers their conservation intentions to follow a former supervisor to a new employer and thus serves as a pull factor. We thus highlight an irony: Organizations that encourage supervisors to develop high-quality LMX relationships with their subordinates to benefit from the positive outcomes (e.g., commitment, organizational citizenship behavior) simultaneously increase the risk of concurrent withdrawals by supervisors and valued subordinates. This research thus offers a necessary, more critical view of LMX (Lord et al., 2016).

## 6.2 | Managerial implications

Organizations and HR professionals must recognize that LMX relationships present a potential risk in addition to their potential benefits. High-quality LMX relationships enhance SITI and therefore may be responsible for concurrent withdrawals of supervisors and subordinates. Consequently, HR managers should seek countermeasures to prevent the loss of knowledge and the tremendous costs associated with turnover. When a supervisor leaves, organizations should pay particular attention to retaining subordinates who belonged to that supervisor's in-group. The findings of Study 3 reveal that high-quality LMX members perceive uncertainty regarding the leader's successor and envision resource losses when their leaders announce their decision to quit. HR managers therefore should actively and promptly approach high-quality members to learn about the resources that are important to them and to jointly develop a retention strategy.

Furthermore, our qualitative findings indicate that managers cannot rely on organizational commitment to bind employees emotionally to the organization. Rather, they should try to address other forces that could reduce employees' intentions to follow their former leaders. For example, HR managers could initiate transition workshops and use team-building activities to introduce the team to the successor to reduce uncertainties. Such workshops should emphasize the individual contributions of each team member to enhance team-member exchange (TMX) and workgroup commitment through jointly defined team goals. TMX has proven to reduce employees' TI (Banks et al., 2014). In Study 3, participants who rejected their leader's offer frequently mentioned team commitment, which is another proximal

form of commitment (Vandenberghe et al., 2004), as a reason for their decision.

The people development department can also establish preventive measures. As the direct supervisor is often considered a mentor, people development should establish mentoring programs, in which they actively transfer the mentor role to executives from other departments. In such cases, employees have other hierarchically high confidants, that stay in the organization to provide them with valuable resources, in case that their direct leader leaves the company.

The enhancing effect of supportive–disloyal leadership behavior on the relationship between LMX and SIT also suggests the need for effective compliance management systems as part of HRM systems by defining clear guidelines regarding which benefits supervisors may grant their subordinates and which are not in line with the interests of the organization.

### 6.3 | Limitations and directions for future research

Several limitations of this study suggest opportunities for further investigation. We propose that SIT lead to substantial voluntary turnover that damages organizations due to the related costs. In contrast to the first two studies, Study 3 examined actual SIT, and the considerable amount of SIT dyads we were able to identify indicates that SIT is not a rare phenomenon. However, we have not quantified the amount of voluntary turnover associated with SIT. Further research might determine the prevalence of enticement efforts by supervisors who leave their current organization, perhaps by employing a critical incident design. Such research could also investigate whether supervisors' job offers are limited to high-quality LMX subordinates to broaden our critical insights into SIT.

Furthermore, an important contingency in the context of leaders' impact on followers' turnover might be the leaders' set of formal and informal network ties. Previous research has found support for the idea that leaders' positions in larger structures impact employees' outcomes based on the social capital they can borrow from their leaders (e.g., Sparrowe & Liden, 2005). Thus, employees' SIT might depend on their perceptions of how well connected their leader is because this is likely to shape their own influence and career in the new organization. We therefore call for future studies that incorporate leaders' network ties in SIT research. Additionally, extant research has proven that turnover appears in clusters (Krackhardt & Porter, 1986) and that employees become contagioned by their coworkers' turnover-related attitudes and behaviors (Porter & Rigby, 2021). Conversely, in line with other studies (e.g., Felps et al., 2009), the results of Study 3 suggest that the relationships to coworkers tie employees to their current organization. While our paper focused on the leader–member relationships, we encourage future SIT research to also consider employees' (network) ties to coworkers to obtain a more comprehensive relational understanding on the turnover phenomenon.

Our study also has some measurement- and design-related limitations. First, in each of our studies, our investigations are limited to parts of our COR-based model of the SIT decision process. To fully capture the proposed mechanisms, future research should employ a

research design that allows testing the model as a whole. Second, we measure SIT in our quantitative studies and not actual turnover behavior. At this early research stage, we consider this approach appropriate to detect the risks of LMX. We also note previous research that has shown that general TI lead to actual turnover behavior (e.g., Chang et al., 2013) which likely pertains to SIT and SIT behavior. Although Study 3 provides some insights regarding the relational antecedents that promote or hinder actual SIT, the results do not yield quantitative relationships. Yet in Study 2, the scenarios might offer limited external validity, as participants indicated their hypothetical attitudes and behavior. Although studies such as ours help reveal basic psychological mechanisms (Greenberg & Eskew, 1993), we encourage researchers to develop a quantitative study design that can be used to investigate actual SIT behavior. Third, the measures in our studies were self-reported, which could create a consistency bias. However, we took steps to reduce the risk of CMV, and the tests showed that common method bias did not affect our results. Further, the data of Pilot Study 1 was collected cross-sectionally. Therefore, causality cannot unambiguously be inferred from the results. Additionally, in measuring participants' SIT, we did not specify the point in time when the supervisor makes the job offer, even though such timing may be an important element. It would be interesting to examine if SIT represents rather a rash action or if employees seek to reduce risk and wait to see whether their leader flourishes in the new organization. We therefore call for longitudinal and multi-source research that investigates how SIT and SIT develop over time. Fourth, we employed an idiosyncratic scenario setting in Study 2 by choosing a restaurant context. However, it might be possible that employees react differently to LMX and supportive–disloyal leadership in other contexts such as knowledge-based work. Further research might therefore provide a knowledge-based business setting when conducting scenario-based experiments in the context of SIT. Fifth, our studies could have benefited from considering additional control variables, such as employees' income, their network centrality, and perceived workplace loneliness. Future studies should consider these relevant controls.

Finally, extant research has shown that culture matters when considering outcomes of LMX (Rockstuhl et al., 2012). Rockstuhl et al. (2012) found that the negative relationship between LMX and TIs is stronger in horizontal-individualistic cultures (i.e., people consider themselves as independent of and equal in status with others) than in vertical-collectivistic ones. These findings evoke the question whether the impact of LMX on SIT is also stronger in horizontal-individualistic cultures and open up a promising avenue for future research. Similarly, organizational practices, such as values-based HRM (e.g., Winter & Jackson, 2014) or talent poaching, might either reduce or elevate SIT because employees adopt the signaled values and behaviors accordingly. Therefore, we encourage future research to examine the impact of organizational practices on the LMX-SIT relationship.

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**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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## APPENDIX A

### SUPERVISOR-INITIATED TURNOVER INTENTION SCALE DEVELOPMENT

We created and evaluated the supervisor-initiated turnover intention (SITI) measure in line with Hinkin's (1995, 1998) recommendations for deductive scale development. This approach relies on the theoretical conceptualization of a construct that serves as the foundation for item generation. As described, we focus on SITI as an employee's willingness to withdraw from the current organization if their former supervisor entices them away with a job offer. Consequently, we created items that reflect an employee's intention to follow their supervisor and to leave their current employing organization. In the following sections, we present our scale development process in detail by describing the item development and by conducting three validation studies that serve to establish the convergent and discriminant validity of our measure.

#### Development of SITI items

Initially, following the best practice suggestions of Crawford and Kelder (2019), the first author generated eight preliminary items based on an extensive review of turnover literature and the theoretical conceptualization of SITI. Afterward, the items were presented to an external expert with a HRM background who, in his professional role, experienced several SIT incidents to enhance the breadth and rigor of the item generation process. The research team then jointly reviewed the items during the face validity check and decided to eliminate three of them after careful consideration. One item did not accurately portray the concept of SITI (i.e., referring to a feeling of discomfort caused by the leader's withdrawal), while the other two were found to be redundant. To further ensure content validity, the remaining items were presented to a group of eight organizational behavior scholars who were not part of the research team. They were asked to analyze whether the concept of SITI is clear and whether the items fully measure the SIT phenomenon (Crawford & Kelder, 2019). Based on the feedback of the judges no further items needed to be eliminated. The final five-item measure is presented in Table B1. We examined and evaluated the SITI measure across three field studies.

#### Scale development studies

##### Sample 1

To explore the underlying factor structure, we included the five-item measure in an online survey. The sample consisted of employees from different sectors (e.g., 26.9% automotive, engineering and construction, 11.5% banking and insurance, 9.7% education) who interacted regularly with their supervisor ( $N = 312$ ; average age = 32.28,  $SD = 10.63$ ). To analyze the underlying factor structure, we

performed exploratory factor analyses using promax rotation. One clear factor emerged during the analyses with an eigenvalue greater than one (i.e., 3.08) and with 62% of the variance explained. Each item loaded on the intended factor at 0.68 or higher ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ,  $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 1.92$ ).

##### Sample 2

Next, we collected additional data to obtain an independent sample to further assess the underlying factor structure. The sample consisted of participants who were employed in different sectors (e.g., 15.2% automotive, engineering and construction; 14.5% banking and insurance; 12.3% retail) and who were reporting to a direct supervisor ( $N = 309$ ; average age = 31.97,  $SD = 10.03$ ). The participants were asked to respond to items regarding their SITI using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). We performed a CFA using AMOS 24 and maximum likelihood estimation ( $\chi^2/df = 2.95$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.08$ ,  $CFI = 0.99$ ,  $TLI = 0.98$ ,  $SRMR = 0.02$ ). The results support the solution of a unidimensional model that fits the data well (Hu & Bentler, 1999). All items had a standardized loading on the intended factor at 0.69 or higher ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ,  $M = 2.69$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ). The AVE of 0.66 exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

##### Sample 3

To complete the SITI scale development process, we collected data to assess the measure's convergent and discriminant validity against related constructs. Based on the theoretical conceptualization, we selected constructs that resemble SITI in terms of either focusing on employees' intention to leave their current employer or reflecting their affect toward their leader. Therefore, we compared SITI to general TI (Wayne et al., 1997) and to employees' trust in their leader

**TABLE B1** Pilot study SITI measure

Construct and scale items	Standardized loadings
Supervisor-initiated turnover intentions (self-developed)	
1. I would follow my leader to a new organization if he/she would ask me to do so.	0.87
2. If my leader quit his/her job, I would seriously think of quitting my job as well.	0.66
3. I would be ready to leave my current employer if my leader offered me a job in his/her new organization.	0.9
4. I would be pleased if my leader offered me a job on his/her team in his/her new organization.	0.81
5. I would consider applying for a job at my leader's new organization to continue working with him/her.	0.86

**TABLE C1** Confirmatory factor analyses results

Variables	$\chi^2, df$	Ratio $\chi^2/df$	$\Delta\chi^2, \Delta df$ (model of comparison)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Pilot Study (LMX, SITI, TI)						
One-factor model	1756.57, 101	17.39	-	0.64	0.57	0.21
Two-factor model (combining SITI and TI)	1102.22, 100	11.02	654.29, 1**	0.78	0.74	0.17
Three-factor model	207.62, 98	2.12	894.60, 2**	0.98	0.97	0.06

Abbreviations: CFI, confirmatory fit index; LMX, leader–member exchange; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SITI, supervisor-initiated turnover intentions; TI, turnover intention; TLI, Tucker–Lewis index.

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**TABLE D1** Scenario treatment for Study 2

You work as a waiter in a successful restaurant. The service team consists of five people, including your supervisor Christina. Christina is only a few years older than you. You can describe your relationship with Christina as follows. She recognizes your potential and understands your problems and needs. When you have problems at work, she often uses her power to help you solve them. Additionally, you have enough confidence in her that you would defend and justify her decisions. Overall, you would describe your working relationship with Christina as very good. Christina frequently goes against management's directives by illicitly allowing you to drink colas instead of water during your shift, and she also allows you to finish work early when the restaurant is not busy but still ensures that you get paid for the whole evening.

Note: This scenario represents the high-quality LMX and supportive–disloyal leadership behavior present condition.

Abbreviation: LMX, leader–member exchange.

(Podsakoff et al., 1990). We also included global job embeddedness (Crossley et al., 2007) in the analysis because it opposes SITI in reflecting employees' attachment to their organization. Due to their conceptual proximity, we anticipated moderately high correlations (i.e., convergent validity) between our SITI measure and these constructs but still expected them to be distinct from each other

(i.e., discriminant validity). We invited employees from different sectors (e.g., 25.4% automotive, engineering, and construction; 10.7% healthcare; 9.0% banking and insurance) who were currently employed and reported to a direct supervisor through social media to participate in an online survey to generate an independent sample ( $N = 122$ ; average age = 33.45,  $SD = 8.25$ ).

The SITI measure had a mean of 2.76 (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) and a standard deviation of 1.32 ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ). Relating to convergent validity, SITI had moderate but significant correlations with general TI ( $r = -0.22, p = 0.03$ ) and global job embeddedness ( $r = 0.27, p = 0.01$ ). However, these results do not raise any discriminant validity concerns. The correlation with trust in leader was rather high and significant ( $r = 0.71, p = 0.00$ ). To demonstrate that SITI and trust in leader are distinct constructs, we conducted a chi-square difference test. We compared a four-factor model (with all items loading on their intended constructs:  $\chi^2/df = 2.17$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.10$ ,  $CFI = 0.91$ ,  $TLI = 0.90$ ,  $SRMR = 0.06$ ) to a three-factor model combining items for SITI with trust in leader items ( $\chi^2/df = 3.29$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.14$ ,  $CFI = 0.83$ ,  $TLI = 0.80$ ,  $SRMR = 0.09$ ). The chi-square difference revealed that the four-factor model was superior to the three-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 235.26, \Delta df = 3, p = 0.00$ ). Therefore, these results support the discriminant validity of LMX and trust in leader.