

The end is just the beginning: Turnover events and their impact on those who remain

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Abstract

Turnover is not only the ending of an employment relationship, it is also the potential beginning of a new reality for those who remain in the organization. The impact of voluntary and involuntary turnover events on organizational “stayers” represents an unfortunate gap in extant turnover theory. Conceptualizing turnover as a beginning rather than an ending suggests the possibility that turnover events may increase, decrease, or have no effect on cognitions, decisions, and behaviors of those who remain in the organization. Yet, despite this possibility, we know very little about what happens to organizational members after turnover events occur. To address this gap, we develop Turnover Event Theory (TET). TET is a middle-range, event-centered theory that describes how turnover events first activate stayers’ attention and then are subject to a distinctive psychological interpretation process. By describing the processes that follow a turnover event, TET provides a needed explanation of how a turnover event may cause or derail downstream turnover events and change stayers’ behaviors and cognitions. We develop specific propositions to better understand this phenomenon and offer guidelines for future theoretical and empirical research.

KEYWORDS

cognitive appraisals, event-oriented research, turnover research, event system theory

What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from. In *Little Gidding* (T. S. Eliot, 1942)

1 | INTRODUCTION

People leave organizations all the time. Turnover is ubiquitous, problematic, and costly. It is a singular, distinctive type of event (i.e., a “turnover event” [TE]) that reflects the ending of a formal employment relationship. Because of its organizational importance, research on the topic has flourished (Hom, Lee, Shaw, & Hausknecht, 2017), focused on classifying the different types of turnover, exploring the reasons people leave, and devising ways to reduce its negative effects. Thousands of studies have been published, producing considerable insight about the causes and organizational consequences of turnover (Hausknecht & Trevor, 2011; Rubenstein, Eberly, Lee, & Mitchell, 2018). Although turnover research is diverse, this vast body of research has one thing in common: a focus on turnover as an outcome, as a dependent variable, as an ending.

But what if we also consider turnover as a beginning or a starting point for significant effects experienced by those who remain in the organization? Employees sometimes quit when close peers leave (Bartunek, Huang, & Walsh, 2008; Felps et al., 2009) and sometimes subordinates decide to quit after leaders depart (Ballinger, Lehman, & Schoorman, 2010). We know that turnover can lead to changes in social networks (Krackhardt & Porter, 1986), changes in team states (Hale, Ployhart, & Shepherd, 2016), or raise concerns about the future (Shapiro, Hom, Shen, & Agarwal, 2016). All of these could be considered negative effects for stayers. But it is also the case that sometimes employees experience positive outcomes following the departure of peers or leaders. For example, the firing of an abusive leader or the voluntary departure of a negative colleague might make the organizational environment more pleasant and short-circuit potential turnover. The turnover of certain individuals could actually increase job satisfaction (Krackhardt & Porter, 1985) and decrease turnover intentions driven by relational conflict with the person who leaves (Chen, Sharma, Edinger, Shapiro, & Farh, 2011). Similarly, research on “bad apples” (Felps, Mitchell, & Byington, 2006) suggests that if a negative individual leaves a team, there could be positive changes for those who remain. These types of TEs portend a brighter future, reducing turnover among those who have stayed in the organization.

Thus, any given TE is an ending, but also a beginning of something new for those who remain. When viewed in this light, a TE is but one event in a broader flow of events, echoed in the observation that, “Real-world turnover is not isolated, but, rather, embedded within broader dynamic systems” (Call, Nyberg, Ployhart, & Weekley, 2015, p. 1208). Although TEs might increase, decrease, or have no effect on subsequent turnover of those who remain in the organization, we know very little about how TEs impact stayers in organizational settings. This is unfortunate because TEs are often meaningful and salient in the wider organizational system, and there is increasing recognition of the significant effect events can have across time and space (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015).

To address these limitations in turnover theory, we develop Turnover Event Theory (TET). TET seeks to explain why and when the remaining organizational members are affected after voluntary or involuntary TEs occur. By articulating the psychological processes resulting from different types of TEs, we show how they may impact stayers’ cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors as well as potential downstream TEs. This involves understanding the implications different TEs have for structural changes, sensemaking processes, and changes in cognitions and behaviors.

TET makes three distinct theoretical contributions. First, it describes the psychological processes that are triggered by voluntary and involuntary TEs. By describing these processes, we are better able to understand and predict when future turnover will occur and when it will not occur. Although there is an extensive literature on the consequences of aggregated levels of turnover at organizational levels (mostly related to financial performance and productivity), little theory has been developed regarding the consequences for those who remain in the organization (Call et al., 2015; Hausknecht & Holwerda, 2013). TET thus expands the limited view that turnover is either organizationally functional or dysfunctional by providing a more nuanced description of the effects of TEs for those who remain.

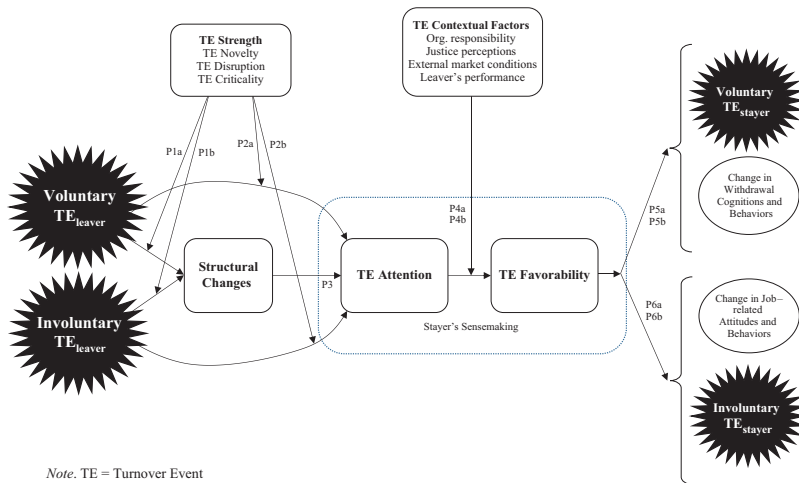


FIGURE 1 Turnover Event Theory

Second, TET explicitly focuses on change and thus captures dynamic change processes following TEs. Although recurrent, TEs are not ongoing organizational processes (such as job performance, or other typical dependent variables). Instead, turnover is a discrete event that can initiate a change process that impacts stayers' cognitions and behaviors and the likelihood that they will leave the organization. This explicit focus on change and dynamic processes over time presents a more veridical account of the impact of turnover over time. This acknowledges the powerful role of events as dynamic constitutive elements of organizational phenomena (Allport, 1967; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999).

Third, TET develops novel turnover theory by building a conceptual bridge between the existing turnover literature and event-centric theoretical frameworks. In so doing, TET draws from and extends event-centric theories by focusing on TEs and their consequences to create new turnover theory. This integration yields novel theoretical insight because it identifies and explains the structural and psychological processes that follow TEs by utilizing and further developing event-centric perspectives within the turnover literature. Thus, TET is a middle-range theory (Merton, 1957) that applies concepts from more general event theories to the phenomenon of turnover. In so doing, TET describes whether TEs command attention and how they are interpreted to produce important changes in withdrawal cognitions and job-related behaviors.

2 | DEFINING TURNOVER EVENTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON STAYERS

TET is depicted in Figure 1 and it starts when a TE occurs. A TE is defined as any instance in which a worker ceases organizational employment. As such, TEs are discrete incidents at specific points in time. TEs create two distinctive groups: (a) "leavers" who are no longer employed and (b) "stayers" who remain employed with the organization. A fundamental premise of TET is that TEs play a pivotal role in initiating a series of changes and sensemaking processes that ultimately have a significant effect on stayers.

Yet, not all TEs are the same. Although there are many ways to describe TEs, the voluntariness of a TE is the most fundamental and oldest distinction made in the turnover literature (Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012). The voluntariness of a TE is an essential distinction because it reflects the locus of causality for the event (i.e., self vs. other) and thus reflects who is making the turnover decision or choice: the employee or the organization (Shaw, Delery, Jenkins, & Gupta, 1998).¹ This is structurally and psychologically meaningful because voluntary and involuntary turnover have fundamentally different motivational bases, have quite different consequences for stayers, have very different

implications for the broader organizational context, and have significant implications for subsequent psychological processes.

TEs have two important implications for stayers. First, TEs can produce structural changes in the work context. These structural changes reflect alterations of job demands, resources, and work relationships, all consequences of voluntary and involuntary TEs. Second, TEs can command the attention of stayers, causing them to notice and attend to the event. Attending to the TE occurs because of the TE itself or because of structural changes the TE makes to the work context, ultimately prompting more complex interpretations. Interestingly, the magnitude of structural changes and whether a TE is noticed and attended to depends on the TE's strength. Given its central role, we discuss TE strength and how it can impact both structural changes and TE attention.

3 | TURNOVER EVENT STRENGTH

As a general theoretical model, Event System Theory (EST) defines events as "external, bounded in time and space, and involve the intersection of different entities" (Morgeson et al., 2015, p. 520). A key construct in EST is event strength, which focuses on the general impact events can have on behaviors, features, and subsequent events, and is defined by an event's novelty, disruption, and criticality. As a more specific middle-range theory, TET adapts the event strength construct to propose that TE strength is a critical construct moderating the relationship between a TE and both structural changes and TE attention.

We define TE strength as the extent to which a TE alters the work context and is perceived as impactful by the stayer. This definition captures the dual impact a TE can have on contextual features (via structural changes) as well as its effect on stayer perceptions of the event. This implies that TEs can produce both objective changes to the work context as well as having important implications for a stayer's subjective perceptions of the TE's impact. As such, TE strength reflects a TE's objective properties and the stayer's inner experience of the TE.

TE strength is a multidimensional construct that is indexed via the event characteristics of novelty, disruption, and criticality (Morgeson et al., 2015). TE novelty reflects the extent to which a TE is uncommon, new, or unexpected. TE disruption reflects the extent to which a TE creates discontinuities in the way that tasks and operations are executed. This is reflected in the degree to which they affect regular activities or break existing routines. TE criticality reflects the extent to which a TE is important, essential, or a priority for goal accomplishment.

Any TE can be indexed in terms of its novelty, disruption, and criticality, with voluntary and involuntary TEs displaying a range of potential levels of each characteristic. Depending on the strength of a given TE, there are a variety of potential impacts on structural changes and the attention given to the TE. It is to these issues that we now turn.

3.1 | Turnover event strength and structural changes

Voluntary and involuntary TEs can result in significant structural changes. The concept of structural changes is instrumental to an extended view of TEs as they naturally occur in organizations. Individuals are likely to see structural changes as part of the same experienced situation but its conceptual separation from a TE itself is critical to better theorize why TEs may produce different effects on stayers. TEs, however, may vary in the extent to which they produce structural changes. We propose that TEs are more likely to create structural changes when TE strength is high. In this section, we first develop the construct of structural changes and then we theorize about why TE strength may moderate the effects of TEs on structural changes.

We define structural changes as the alterations of job demands, resources, and work relationships that follow a TE. For example, when key individuals leave (i.e., high performers or those in strategically core roles), a TE can result in increases in immediate workload and changes in job demands (Reilly, Nyberg, Maltarich, & Weller, 2014), changes in work tasks, or wholesale redesign for the jobs of those who remain (e.g., Call et al., 2015). This type of structural

change associated with alterations of job demands and resources can be directly attributed to the TE and may be the key driver of future outcomes in stayers. Similarly, structural changes can also materialize as changes in work relationships. Consider the example of a leaver who occupies a central role in the social network (i.e., high network centrality) as reflected in numerous and substantial ties to organizational members. The departure of this individual is likely to create significant changes in social networks that would require considerable adaptation. Consistent with this, recent research on social networks and turnover suggests that the position of a leaver can alter important social spaces for stayers (Ballinger, Cross, & Holtom, 2016; Porter, Woo, & Campion, 2016; Porter, Woo, Allen, & Keith, 2019). In addition, leaver characteristics can affect the entire network (Chen & Garg, 2018; Methot, Rosado-Solomon, & Allen, 2018) or specific individuals (Krackhardt & Porter, 1986). Similarly, structural changes or other subsequent organizational events may neutralize or compensate the effects of specific TEs on stayers. Thus, it is critical to model structural changes as directly caused by TEs.

TE strength will moderate the extent to which TEs create structural changes, such that the stronger the TE, the greater the likelihood that structural changes will occur. This is the case for several reasons, which are tied to the intersection between organizational features and event strength. When a TE is novel, the organizational system is less prepared to deal with the consequences of the TE. This can include the inevitable increase in workload as stayers must “cover” for the leaver, the potential loss of expertise, and the likely disruption in communication and collaboration networks.

When a TE is disruptive, the organizational system often recognizes the need for an adaptive response and will act to restore an efficient flow of operations. This will produce many potential structural changes, including transferring or hiring new staff to bolster the stayers, reconfiguring jobs to accommodate the new reality, and adjusting teams to recover losses in teamwork. Interestingly, even if the organizational system does not recognize the need for a response (or chooses to do nothing despite its awareness), structural changes are likely to occur informally. Work still needs to be completed, deadlines still need to be met, and goals still need to be met. Such is the power of disruptive TEs.

When a TE is critical, the organizational system is motivated to avoid losing its competitive advantage because of the TE's implications for goal accomplishment. At its most fundamental, a critical TE might cause an organization to revise or change key goals because the leaver may have been essential to the accomplishment of the previous goal. The abandonment or alteration of goals is likely to have significant implications for structural changes, as the organizational system seeks to adjust to the new goals and the associated changes in demands, resources, and work relationships.

As described above, a strong TE will impact organizations in a variety of ways, prompting a need for change and actions to capitalize on opportunities or avoid threats and reduce uncertainty (Gersick, 1991; Leana & Barry, 2000). This idea is generally supported by previous turnover research. In a recent review of team membership change events, Trainer, Jones, Pendergraft, Maupin, and Carter (2020) suggested that the strength of a TE may have implications in the functioning of a collective entity, causing collective responses to deal with the event. Empirical data also support this idea. For example, Reilly et al. (2014) suggested that job demands are more likely to increase in units with higher turnover rates (a sign of high TE disruption), whereas Call et al. (2015) suggest that turnover quality (a sign of TE criticality) or turnover dispersion (a sign of TE novelty) is significantly related to subsequent actions to regain organizational resources, such as re-staffing plans.

The theoretical mechanisms that support the moderation of TE strength on the relationship between a TE and its structural changes should apply for both voluntary and involuntary turnover, although the conditions that determine TE novelty, disruption, or criticality should vary depending on the type of TE. Table 1 provides some illustrative examples of when a given voluntary or involuntary TE manifests as more novel, disruptive, or critical. These examples are not exhaustive, but only a summary of previous research suggesting what constitutes a highly novel, disruptive, or critical voluntary or involuntary TE.

Proposition 1. *TE strength moderates the relationship between (a) a voluntary and (b) an involuntary TE, and structural changes, such that a TE leads to more structural changes when TE strength is high.*

TABLE 1 Examples of manifestations of TE novelty, TE disruption, and TE criticality for voluntary and involuntary turnover events

TE strength dimension	Voluntary turnover	Turnover event type	Involuntary turnover
TE novelty: Extent to which a TE is uncommon, new, or unexpected.	<p>TE is more likely to command attention when the voluntary turnover rate is low in either the position, department, or organization in which it takes place (Holtom et al., 2005; Tanova & Holtom, 2008).</p> <p>Announcements or turnover disclosures can also affect the novelty of a turnover event such that when the event occurs, individuals may not see the departure as novel but as a foretold well-known event (e.g., Bendeck & Waller, 1999; Dedman & Lin, 2002).</p> <p>Voluntary turnover of leavers who have a long tenure, high job embeddedness, or high organizational commitment will be more surprising and unexpected (cf. Rubenstein et al., 2018).</p>	<p>Involuntary turnover should be perceived as more novel when the frequency of involuntary turnover is low (Brockner et al., 1990). Announcements of involuntary TE made with a short notice can be more surprising for stayers, increasing TE novelty. Similarly, when involuntary turnover can be anticipated through organizational actions (e.g., progressive discipline) or even programmed (e.g., end of a fixed contract with a client), these events are less novel (Smeltzer & Zener, 1992).</p> <p>Under conditions of high employment security, involuntary turnover events are seen as more novel because they diverge from the expected course of events in the workplace (Pfeffer, 1998).</p>	<p>Involuntary turnover should be perceived as more novel when the frequency of involuntary turnover is low (Brockner et al., 1990). Announcements of involuntary TE made with a short notice can be more surprising for stayers, increasing TE novelty. Similarly, when involuntary turnover can be anticipated through organizational actions (e.g., progressive discipline) or even programmed (e.g., end of a fixed contract with a client), these events are less novel (Smeltzer & Zener, 1992).</p> <p>Under conditions of high employment security, involuntary turnover events are seen as more novel because they diverge from the expected course of events in the workplace (Pfeffer, 1998).</p>
TE disruption: Extent to which a TE affects regular activities or breaks existing routines.	<p>TEs of star performers will be more disruptive as their contributions are difficult to replace in the short term and will demand adaptations (O'Boyle & Kroska, 2017).</p> <p>Voluntary turnover of individuals working in the strategic core is likely to be relatively more disruptive to performance and the activities of stayers as will affect "way of doing things" at the collective level (Cao et al., 2006; Humphrey, Morgeson, & Mannor, 2009).</p>	<p>When replacements are not able to help stayers create new routines or fix previous performance problems created by the leaver, it is more difficult for stayers to focus on their regular tasks (Hausknecht & Holwerda, 2013).</p> <p>In layoffs, scale and scope of turnover event influences the amount of disruption experienced (Gilliland & Schepers, 2003).</p>	<p>When replacements are not able to help stayers create new routines or fix previous performance problems created by the leaver, it is more difficult for stayers to focus on their regular tasks (Hausknecht & Holwerda, 2013).</p> <p>In layoffs, scale and scope of turnover event influences the amount of disruption experienced (Gilliland & Schepers, 2003).</p>
TE criticality: Extent to which a TE is important, essential, or a priority for goal accomplishment.	<p>Some coworkers may serve instrumental purposes to other individuals (e.g., fulfillment of intrinsic needs for affiliation) such that a turnover event of those individuals can be initially seen as a personally critical event due to a worsening of the work environment (Krackhardt & Porter, 1986; Mowday et al., 1982).</p> <p>The voluntary departure of an individual who is perceived as psychologically close to a stayer can highlight unseen opportunities and spark "me too" feelings (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001).</p>	<p>Stayers can experience emotional reactions of anger or betrayal (Mikulincher, Shaver, & Perreg, 2003) when termination affects a leaver that is closely attached to the stayer, and perceive the negative action toward a leaver as personal.</p> <p>Leavers with low psychological distance can spark "threat" perceptions for stayers and increase "Am I next?" feelings (Brockner et al., 1987; Brockner et al., 1992; Leana, Feldman, & Tan, 1998).</p>	<p>Stayers can experience emotional reactions of anger or betrayal (Mikulincher, Shaver, & Perreg, 2003) when termination affects a leaver that is closely attached to the stayer, and perceive the negative action toward a leaver as personal.</p> <p>Leavers with low psychological distance can spark "threat" perceptions for stayers and increase "Am I next?" feelings (Brockner et al., 1987; Brockner et al., 1992; Leana, Feldman, & Tan, 1998).</p>

3.2 | Turnover event strength and turnover event attention

Much like their contingent impact on structural changes, the mere occurrence of a TE does not mean that it will be noticed, command attention, lead to more deliberation interpretation, or do much of anything at all. Turnover can be a fairly regular, unremarkable event in an employee's life. Thus, articulating when an event will become salient and command individual attention is essential for understanding how and why a TE impacts (or does not impact) subsequent phenomena. For a TE to produce significant effects, it must initiate a more deliberative and effortful sensemaking process. We propose that TE strength may moderate the effects of TEs on sensemaking processes, as initiated by TE attention. In this section, we first discuss the construct of TE attention and then we theorize why TE strength may moderate the effects of TEs on TE attention.

General event-centric theories provide a conceptual foundation for understanding the psychological processes that follow TEs and help identify the key constructs implicated in the process (Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013; Morgeson et al., 2015). Although multiple specific sub-processes and physiological phenomena have been formulated by psychologists and neurobiologists to explain why and how some events are processed, we first focus on how they catch our attention (Knudsen, 2007; Louis & Sutton, 1991). When a TE does not initiate this sensemaking process, through attention, it is ignored, and a TE is not likely to produce any significant downstream change. Because of this, we focus on TE attention, defined as the psychological state of noticing and subjecting the TE to additional controlled information processing.² TE attention is a construct that reflects the level of cognitive resources invested in a specific TE ranging from zero (ignore event) to high (complete attention to event). TE attention is determined by both the TE itself and the way TE strength moderates its effects (as well structural changes, as we discuss later).

TEs are more strongly related to TE attention when TE strength is high as it forces individuals out of "mindless" or "automatic" processing (Gersick & Hackman, 1990; Langer, 1989). This happens in a number of different ways. First, a novel TE is more likely to make stayers consider whether the situation deserves further processing (Scherer, 2013) as they need more effort to understand the new situation. For example, the food services industry has annual turnover rates of over 70% and specific occupations such as personal care and home health aides can have turnover rates approaching 100%. In these cases, TEs are more the rule than the exception and thus any single TE will tend to be less salient and easier to understand (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Inderrieden, 2005; Tanova & Holtom, 2008). Yet, when TEs are novel, a TE acquires significant new meaning and stayers are more likely to interrupt automatic information processes as they need to invest more resources to find a better understanding of a new situation.

For disruptive TEs, individuals perceive a TE as the cause of major experienced disruptions, forcing them to think in unconventional ways in order to solve or stop the disruption (Morgeson, 2005). Examples of disruptive events would include a very scandalous TE that immediately creates changes, lessons, or challenges. Scandalous TEs are sometimes accompanied by heated arguments, rumors and gossiping, or even negative media coverage or negative comments in social media, which disrupts routines. For instance, previous research has shown that larger layoffs (more disruptive TEs) are more likely to be noticed by other employees (Gilliland & Schepers, 2003).

Finally, TE criticality reflects the extent to which a TE is important for goal accomplishment. Critical TEs command attention, in part because they influence individual and organizational goal accomplishment. A TE may personally affect stayers, driving their attention as these events are relevant for their own lives. In contrast, TEs that are not personally critical for stayers may not create any significant change, producing no reaction. Moreover, through social comparison, stayers may perceive that the reasons for turnover of similar individuals are also personally relevant and may modify the importance of individual goals or even create new goals similar to the leaver (e.g., Seibert, Kraimer, Holtom, & Pierotti, 2013). Such an effect can be inferred from early discussions of the effects of turnover on those who remain (Krackhardt & Porter, 1986; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982), suggesting that personal relevance of a TE is a key driver of subsequent outcomes.

These arguments suggest that more novel, disruptive, and critical TEs should strengthen the positive effect of TEs on TE attention because they force individuals to try to understand the new situation, because they force individuals to monitor and act upon breaks in routines, and because they shape perceptions of personal relevance. Importantly, these event characteristics independently and additively influence TE strength. A stronger TE is less likely to be ignored by individuals and more likely to activate more controlled information processes. Conversely, TEs are less likely to be salient (and more likely to be ignored or go unnoticed) when these dimensions are low thereby not prompting subsequent interpretations. Thus, TE strength should moderate the effect of TEs on TE attention, as more impactful events (as perceived by stayers) should activate attention processes.

Proposition 2. *TE strength moderates the relationship between (a) a voluntary and (b) an involuntary TE, and TE attention, such that a TE leads to high TE attention when TE strength is high.*

3.3 | Structural changes and turnover event attention

In addition to the direct effect of voluntary and involuntary TEs on TE attention (as moderated by TE strength), structural changes can also directly impact TE attention. A key idea of TET is that in order to understand the effects of TEs, one must consider the broad spectrum of changes that occur after TEs. Although TEs can directly affect TE attention, we propose that structural changes are key partial mediators of the effects of TEs and the stayers' sensemaking process, which is initiated by TE attention.

For example, as dynamic and emergent constructs, team emergent states heavily depend on team composition and interactions among team members, which can drastically change as individuals depart (Cronin, Weingart, & Todorova, 2011; Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001; Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999). These kinds of structural changes, reflected in a change of work relationships, can call attention to the TE when they become personally relevant. In general, we propose that the level of TE attention is influenced by the structural changes brought about by the TE. Job demands, resources, and relationships are important elements of the work context, and changes in these aspects of work after a TE are likely considered as relevant for stayers (Bartunek et al., 2008; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002).

In addition, the greater the structural changes occurring after a TE, the more likely that stayers will devote cognitive resources to the event, thereby increasing TE attention. This becomes relevant when considering that multiple structural changes can occur at the same time, creating a significant trigger for TE attention (and subsequent interpretations). This proposition has been indirectly suggested by different turnover theories. For instance, Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) theorized that in downsizing events, survivors reactions may depend on the extent to which their jobs have been changed. In addition, Summers, Humphrey, and Ferris (2012) argued that the effects of team member change would be a direct function of the resulting flux of coordination among stayers, suggesting that work relationship changes may be an important mediator of the effects of TEs.

Proposition 3. *Structural changes partially mediate the effects of TEs on TE attention.*

4 | EVALUATING SALIENT TURNOVER EVENTS

The previous sections have suggested that the strength of a TE functions as a moderator of the effects of TEs on structural changes and TE attention. It is only after a TE or the structural changes that result from the TE have captured the attention of stayers that more complex social and psychological activities involving conscious information processing can occur (Knudsen, 2007; Scherer, 2013). Having described how TEs come to the attention of individuals, we turn to the ways in which TEs are actively assessed by those who remain in the organization. In later interpretation processes,

individuals actively evaluate a TE and the potential implications of any structural changes that may have occurred. We focus on how stayers construct perceptions of TE favorableness by interpreting information about the TE, structural changes, and any additional information arising from the social environment. This interpretation process ultimately drives changes in individual cognitions and behaviors, yet it is also the case that stayers may be indifferent to a TE, producing no significant changes.

4.1 | The psychological bases of turnover event favorability

Complex and deliberate interpretations of potential future outcomes and implications for long-term goals are a natural response of individuals to strong events (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Sweeny, 2008). These interpretations involve attributions that help individuals better evaluate information related to the outcomes of a TE. The understanding of the new situation and attributions of the event are later used to assess the favorability of a TE, which yields a conclusion of whether the event is positive or negative for an individual's own goals.

Of course, TEs are not inherently negative (Mueller & Price, 1989; Shaw, 2011) and might even have positive implications for stayers. Individuals typically have their own theories, interpretations, and evaluations of TEs such that they assess the implications of TEs for achievement of their own goals or needs. Contemporary appraisal theories suggest that individuals evaluate whether events are significant for their own well-being using different cognitive components (Folkman et al., 1986; Scherer, 2013). One of the most important components of the event interpretation process is a judgment of the event's consequences for personal goal attainment (Moors et al., 2013; Scherer, 2013). We term this TE favorability and formally define it as the perception of the extent to which the consequences of a TE are positive or negative for the attainment of the person's goals. Analogous to the distinction between functional and dysfunctional turnover at the organizational level (Dalton, Todor, & Krackhardt, 1982), TE favorability is focused on what is good or bad in the eyes of stayers. The extent to which stayers perceive that a TE is positive or negative for future goal attainment is the ultimate outcome of a complex individual interpretation process, and guides future deliberations of whether an action is needed and what are the best suitable responses. In TET, we focus on the contextual factors related to the occurrence of a TE that may determine TE favorability.

4.2 | The context of turnover event favorability

When individuals observe the end of an employment relationship, they create explanations of the TE in order to anticipate future organizational responses and to more deliberately assess whether the event supports their own goal achievement. For example, significant events can serve as a signal of the willingness of employees to continue engaging in positive or negative exchanges with an organization (Ballinger et al., 2010; Fedor, Caldwell, & Herold, 2006). Employees can observe how other employees are treated when they stop working for an organization and this TE information enables them to infer how trustworthy organizational agents are (Ng & Feldman, 2013). According to Blau's (1964) social exchange theory, social exchanges depend on trust in the other party in order to reciprocate favors, establish positive social exchanges, and avoid exploitation. TEs can serve as important pieces of information to anticipate beneficial or negative situations in the future.

TE contextual factors influence the interpretation of a TE, can serve as input for more complex interpretations of TE favorability, and help stayers anticipate whether future exchanges will be positive or negative. Because the factors that serve as input for interpretations of voluntary TEs are different than the factors that affect involuntary TEs, we discuss them separately.

4.2.1 | Voluntary turnover events

For voluntary TEs, it is generally an employee who activates the turnover process, taking concrete steps to leave the organization (Maertz & Campion, 2004). In general, those leaving make the decision to leave, communicate their decision to the organization and coworkers, and often determine the timing of the TE. This feature of voluntary TEs has natural implications for interpretation processes, as the main reasons for departure should be initially evaluated and centered around the leaver and his or her decision-making process. In that case, stayers are more likely to assess whether the leaver departs because of elements that were under his or her control, whether the departure was initiated by the individual, and whether the reasons for the departure are stable across time (Weiner, 1985). Yet, individuals are also likely to evaluate the organization's role in the event. This is done, in part, because stayers are motivated to predict the organization's future behavior toward themselves (they are the ones staying after all), using the TE as a key source of information. These attribution processes normally precede the development of TE favorability perceptions (Scherer, 2001). Perceptions of organizational responsibility and perceptions of interactional justice are two particularly important influences on the interpretation process and perceptions of TE favorability.

First, stayers may ask whether the organization has some degree of responsibility for the voluntary TE. Research on responsibility perceptions in attributions suggests that individuals tend to form opinions about who or what can be held accountable for an event, especially when the event may be initially perceived as having negative consequences (Shaver, 1985). Organizations could be perceived as more responsible for a voluntary TE if there is a belief that the organization could have acted to avoid the event (e.g., the organization is not able to keep satisfactory working conditions; Rubenstein et al., 2018). As individuals leaving the organization convey the reasons for their departure to other employees, it is likely that they can also alter the attributions of organizational responsibility for the voluntary TE, affecting the development of TE favorability perceptions.

Second, the justice literature has shown that individuals are highly influenced by third-party justice perceptions (Dunford, Jackson, Boss, Tay, & Boss, 2015; O'Reilly, Aquino, & Skarlicki, 2016). Individuals that perceive that the organization has been unfair to other individuals tend to experience negative reactions including low organizational identification, low trust, moral anger, or even willingness to punish the organization (Barclay & Kiefer, 2019; Dunford et al., 2015; O'Reilly et al., 2016). When employees are not treated with enough respect when they leave an organization (i.e., interactional justice), they may extend their negative perceptions to anticipate less beneficial social exchanges in the future for themselves because justice can serve as a proxy for trustworthiness (Colquitt & Rodell, 2011). In addition, uncertainty management theory (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002) has suggested that perceptions of injustice in the workplace may create psychological uncertainty, causing individuals to question the value of continuing to develop a relationship with an organization that offers little prospect of positive experiences (Hogg, 2000). In essence, more uncertainty decreases the expectation that the new situation will be favorable. In contrast, when the organization treats departing individuals with respect, accepting his/her decision, caring for his/her future welfare, and showing interest in the turnover decision, TE favorability is increased.

Proposition 4a. *For voluntary TEs, TE contextual factors moderate the relationship between TE attention and TE favorability, such that TE attention is positively related to TE favorability when (a) perceptions of organizational responsibility are low and (b) perceptions of interactional justice are high.*

4.2.2 | Involuntary turnover events

For involuntary TEs, the employer activates the turnover process. Organizations are the actors that make the decision, communicate the decision to the employee and to other employees, and decide the timing of the TE. More negative perceptions of involuntary TEs are created as individuals perceive negative characteristics of organizations during the

event that may also induce stronger initial emotions and enhance the probability that individual goals are now more difficult to attain. Similarly, when an involuntary TE is evaluated in positive ways by employees, attributions may confirm positive characteristics of organizations as good employers. For example, terminating “bad apples” (Felps et al., 2006) can be perceived by other employees as a behavior that demonstrates integrity (Colquitt & Rodell, 2011). Three important TE contextual factors may drive TE favorability perceptions of involuntary TEs: (a) leaver’s previous performance, (b) perceptions of external market conditions, and (c) perceptions of distributive and procedural justice.

First, the perceptions that stayers develop of leaver’s performance may be important to determine whether the termination was justified or not. Previous research has shown that employees are more likely to perceive dismissals as legitimate when employees have demonstrated poor marginal performance in the past (O’Reilly III & Weitz, 1980). When perceptions of bad performance are deemed to be a key driver of involuntary turnover, other individuals may perceive that the explanation of the event does not necessarily lie in stable and negative organizational characteristics, but in unforeseeable situations for the organization and past behaviors that were in control of the terminated person. Thus, stayers are less likely to think that the involuntary TE has negative implications for themselves.

Second, the broader context can also contain important elements that individuals consider when interpreting involuntary turnover. For example, difficult economic conditions (e.g., recession and excessive competition) may be perceived as an external factor that forces organizations to act to ensure organizational viability. In contrast, when economic conditions are favorable, involuntary turnover such as layoffs is more likely to be seen as a failure to effectively manage the business or a failure to take employee concerns into account. Research on the effect of layoffs on survivors has shown that individuals are less likely to experience negative effects after large-scale terminations when they perceive that the decision was unavoidable and uncontrollable (Brockner, DeWitt, Grover, & Reed, 1990). Similarly, when TEs are perceived to occur due to more stable and controllable reasons (originating within the organization), individuals are more likely to respond with negative behaviors (Douglas & Martinko, 2001; Hall, Hladkyj, Perry, & Ruthig, 2004) as well as lower intentions to engaging in future interactions.

Third, perceptions of distributive and procedural justice are related to attributions (Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004) and are used by individuals to understand the favorability of TEs. Previous research has suggested that justice perceptions are commonly developed as a result of involuntary TEs (Bies, 2013; Butterfield, Treviño, Wade, & Ball, 2005; Treviño, 1992). For example, the use of advanced notices, methods of communicating termination decisions to leavers, and the amount of information provided regarding the termination decision have been shown to be related to attributions of just treatment (Gilliland & Schepers, 2003; Skarlicki, Ellard, & Kelln, 1998). In the case of layoffs, survivors usually question whether the termination process included clear rules for deciding who was terminated and whether the rules for termination were equally distributed among different types of workers (Brockner et al., 1994). Especially considering that termination is one of the most extreme forms of action taken against employees, stayers are likely to evaluate the organization’s behaviors with respect to these events to anticipate how the organization might behave toward them in the future.

Proposition 4b. *For voluntary TEs, TE contextual factors moderate the relationship between TE attention and TE favorability, such that TE attention is positively related to TE favorability when (a) perceptions of the leaver’s performance are low, (b) external market conditions are negative, and (c) perceptions of distributive and procedural justice are high.*

5 | CONSEQUENCES OF INTERPRETATION: CHANGES IN COGNITION, BEHAVIOR, AND FUTURE TURNOVER

After the interpretation process ends, stayers can positively or negatively change their withdrawal cognitions and behaviors, as well as other job-related behaviors. Although the path that describes the relationship between more general perceptions of favorability to TEs has been extensively researched in the past (Holtom et al., 2005; Holtom,

Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008; Mobley, 1977), we offer additional insights to turnover research by expanding the possible outcomes of TEs.

When TEs are evaluated as unfavorable by stayers, the TE can make work environments more difficult to cope with and raise concerns and uncertainty about the future of the employee in the organization. Stayers perceiving TEs as impediments to their ability to reach personal goals should assign a negative evaluation to those events and will experience a “push force” to increase turnover intentions and actual turnover (Burton, Holtom, Sablinski, Mitchell, & Lee, 2010). The effects of negative “shocks” on employees have been extensively researched as an antecedent of voluntary turnover decisions (Holtom et al., 2008; Hom et al., 2017). However, as previously discussed, a TE can be deemed favorable for stayers, in which case withdrawal cognitions, behaviors, and further turnover could actually decrease. This theoretical path is extremely important as turnover researchers have generally assumed that turnover contagion occurs in generalized contexts (Rubenstein et al., 2018) with little empirical evidence showing if or when TEs are considered positive for stayers. Thus, we propose that TE favorability (sign and level) could be a significant predictor of positive and negative change in stayers’ outcomes.

Proposition 5. *TE favorability is negatively related to (a) withdrawal cognitions and behaviors and (b) voluntary TEs.*

Of course, stayers perceiving low TE favorability may reduce efforts and develop unfavorable attitudes toward the organization, modifying job-related behaviors, which may indeed create a legitimate reason for an involuntary TE. Individuals tend to detach from situations where they have low expectations of a brighter future (Maertz & Boyar, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2016). Judge, Scott, and Ilies (2006) support this idea when they suggest that significant work events that produce negative affect may motivate workplace deviance, a typical reason for involuntary turnover. Supporting this, Brockner, Grover, Reed, and Dewitt (1992) found that individuals who experience threat after a layoff process are more likely to report a negative change in work efforts. Less favorable expectations about the future should be related to a decrease in organizational attachment, a typical antecedent of job performance (Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004). This suggests that significant TEs can serve as an “anchoring” event that modify how individuals approach their jobs and tasks (Ballinger & Rockmann, 2010), and that low TE favorability may even produce behaviors associated with a higher likelihood for the occurrence of another involuntary TE.

In contrast, high TE favorability can create a new motivational source that may improve job-related behaviors. For example, when the leaver is considered a negative part of an employees work environment, this can create a positive motivational force that increases performance (Chen et al., 2011). In addition, a TE that produces new job vacancies could make stayers more interested in increasing their job performance in order to capitalize on the new career opportunity (Kraimer, Seibert, Wayne, Liden, & Bravo, 2011). Individuals perceiving opportunities for advancement tend to display more positive organizational attitudes (Landau & Hammer, 1986). In total, this suggests that high levels of TE favorability should be related to other positive changes in job-related attitudes and behaviors.

Proposition 6. *TE favorability is (a) positively related to job-related attitudes and behaviors and (b) negatively related to involuntary TEs.*

6 | DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Although TEs are relevant for subsequent outcomes, little theory and research has considered this issue. Because turnover is not exclusively an ending but also a beginning of another sequence of events, developing theory aimed at understanding TEs as a part of a larger set of outcomes is sorely needed. TET explains how TEs affect stayers and develop a number of propositions focused on the complex process that follows a TE. Moreover, TET expands existing theories about the effects of TEs in a more comprehensive and dynamic way and offers a deeper and more nuanced

theoretical explanation of the impact of TEs on those who remain in the organization. This feature of TET stands in contrast to most previous turnover models and theories, which largely focus on predicting TEs.

6.1 | Turnover event theory in context

There is anecdotal and empirical evidence that TEs can have significant downstream effects (Felps et al., 2009; Polacek, 2019; Rubenstein et al., 2018). Although comparatively little research has explored the theoretical reasons that explain these effects (compared to efforts focused on predicting turnover), there has been at least two streams of research that has considered some of the issues covered by TET. It is important to understand how TET is related to and goes beyond this past work.

Certainly, TET is not the first theory to acknowledge that TEs can create significant effects for stayers. As previously discussed, research on layoffs and layoff survivors has examined some of these issues before (e.g., Brockner, Grover, Reed, DeWitt, & O'Malley, 1987). However, this previous research has been limited in several ways. First, past research has focused on specific types of TEs. For example, the downsizing literature has been focused on discovering the effects of layoffs on survivors (Datta, Guthrie, Basuil, & Pandey, 2010). Layoffs are a very specific type of large-scale involuntary TE, naturally disruptive and negative, acting on stayers through very specific mechanisms (injustice, stress, uncertainty). This negative connotation is reflected in the extensive use of the word "survivor" to refer to those who stay after a layoff event. TET goes beyond this research by showing that TEs can also be positive or indifferent, acting on stayers through other (so-far) understudied mechanisms, different than those experienced by layoffs survivors.

Second, TET actively models the structural changes associated with a specific TE, thus avoiding the conceptualization of TEs as a more general, omnibus kind of event (Hausknecht & Holwerda, 2013). Unfortunately, most previous research about the effects of turnover has assumed that TEs should be equivalent, or at least very similar, to each other (e.g., Kuypers, Guenter, & van Emmerik, 2015). Finally, although the layoff literature (e.g., Brockner et al., 1990; Brockner et al., 1986; Brockner et al., 1992) has offered a variety of different theoretical explanations (e.g., equity theory, balance and justice theory, stress and coping theory, job insecurity theory, and attribution theory), a more integrated view of the effects of TEs is needed. TET integrates and extends this past research.

In addition to this research, the unfolding model of turnover (Lee & Mitchell, 1994) is an influential theory that focuses on the role of events in turnover decision-making. It is important to understand how TET is similar to and different from the unfolding model. There are at least five significant differences between TET and the unfolding model. First, the unfolding model is more generally concerned with the antecedents of quit decisions (i.e., voluntary turnover). As such, turnover (in the form of quit decisions) is largely conceptualized and theorized as the final outcome in a decision process. In contrast, TET is focused on turnover as an antecedent. Second, the unfolding model explicitly focuses on explaining quit decisions, which means that other effects on stayers from an initial shock (such as changes in job performance, attitudes, or other relevant behaviors) are not considered. Third, although the unfolding model identifies several event-driven "decision paths" (referred to as "shocks"), it also proposes other paths that are not event driven (e.g., low satisfaction). Thus, the unfolding model is only partially event focused. TET, on the other hand, is specifically focused on TEs and, thus, may reveal more sharp insights into the effects of turnover. Fourth, when describing the decision paths initiated by "shocks," the unfolding model draws from image theory to explain that a shock could challenge a desired image of oneself, making individuals quit or search for job alternatives as a way to be congruent with one's image. Unfortunately, the unfolding model does not describe the specific characteristics of the shock that create a significant change in individuals. TET presents an expanded conceptualization of events, describing when TEs create structural changes and capture the attention of stayers. Fifth, the unfolding model is explicitly limited to exploring the decision paths that result in voluntary turnover. TET goes beyond this focus by incorporating involuntary turnover as an additional (but often neglected) type of turnover.

6.2 | Theoretical implications and future research

TET takes an extended view of TEs by recognizing that they are not all the same, and consequently, not inherently positive or negative for stayers. TEs can produce structural changes that alter attention and interpretation processes in stayers. Importantly, TET describes the characteristics that determine whether a TE prompts future interpretation processes. In order to understand the effects of TEs, we strongly recommend future research consider the range of structural changes that co-occur when employees leave. Such an expanded focus poses methodological challenges, but it also more faithfully represents the complexity inherent in TE consequences.

TET is general enough to serve as a base for modeling more specific phenomena linking TEs. For example, TET does not exclusively focus on either voluntary or involuntary forms of turnover. A focal initial TE may be produced either by voluntary or involuntary reasons, and although these types of TEs may differ in nature and scope, both have the potential to create more voluntary or involuntary TEs by modifying phenomena that change turnover intentions in other employees. The links between voluntary and involuntary turnover have not been heavily researched, although TET suggests this is a distinct possibility and one deserving additional research attention.

Another issue revolves around exactly how long a TE might impact stayers. This can be thought of as the duration or “half-life” of TEs, which is the time from a TE’s occurrence until its effects significantly decay on a stayer. Previous research suggests that precipitating events can impact TEs as long as 1–2 years later (Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, & Hill, 1999), but their effects may not last indefinitely. Other turnover theories have suggested that individuals may go through several stages of adaptation after the occurrence of significant events (Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007; Hale et al., 2016) and that there may be important variance to be explained in terms of the duration of TEs effects (Morgeson & DeRue, 2006). We suggest that the duration of a TE may depend on properties of the event itself and the processes we described in our model. We encourage future research to explore these issues.

Although TET focuses on the effects of TEs, it is important to acknowledge the possibility that these single events are themselves part of a larger cycle of TEs. These turnover cycles have been observed in the field when several TEs are produced by the same reason or collective cognition (Bartunek et al., 2008; Chen et al., 2011; Liu, Mitchell, Lee, Holtom, & Hinkin, 2012). However, when the reasons that connect two or more TEs differ among each individual, turnover cycles are more difficult to define, characterize, and observe. Thus, TET goes beyond the idea of turnover contagion as this line of research has not completely overcome the assumption that TEs that are connected may not be originated from the same turnover forces. In contrast, TET accounts for the different explanations that may trigger single individual turnover decisions after a TE, providing a more flexible framework to describe the connection of multiple TEs. Similarly, although Figure 1 shows that one TE can create a second TE, the theory does not have to be restricted to single connections. One TE may create additional events at the same time, suggesting the possibility of complex cycles of TEs. Theory and research describing these turnover cycles is sorely needed.

In the same spirit of expanding our model, although we primarily focused on individual-level processes that follow TEs, effects at higher levels of analysis (e.g., team, division, and organization) are certainly possible. For example, it is not difficult to imagine how individual TEs might influence team processes or leadership processes at the organizational level. Similarly, higher level variables (e.g., organization size, formalization, and centralization) might not only influence the occurrence of TEs but also might influence the extent to which TEs influence attention and interpretation processes. Although we did not develop these ideas in our manuscript, we hope future research explores these effects.

Finally, TET poses several challenges for the turnover literature. For example, if TEs can lead to TEs, they may not be considered as independent observations. The nonindependence of observations is a phenomenon that has been largely ignored by turnover researchers (Krackhardt & Porter, 1986) and can threaten the statistical and internal validity of research conclusions. Yet rather than being an artifact to eliminate, TET highlights the natural and meaningful connections among TEs. As such, we encourage researchers to embrace the phenomenon of nonindependence of observations in the larger turnover literature.

6.3 | Assumptions and boundary conditions

As with any theory, TET makes a number of assumptions that are important to acknowledge. In addition, there are a number of potential boundary conditions that should be explored in future research in order to examine the conditions under which TET's propositions hold. First, although TET is presented as a sequential model, we do not assume that once a psychological process starts, a previous step immediately stops. Individuals may revisit previous steps, or process different pieces of information at the same time. We have decided to discuss TET in a sequential fashion for two reasons. First, some processes are more efficiently executed only after the occurrence of other more basic processes. For example, even though more deliberate interpretations of a TE can trigger additional structural changes, provide a better understanding of a situation, and modify perceptions of its strength, these interpretation processes are not possible if a TE is not initially attended to. This is because it would not be efficient to invest cognitive resources in evaluating events that are not different from the normal flow of operations. Thus, TE awareness precedes more complex evaluation processes. Second, some processes may yield definite results before others, that is, they reach what has been called "preliminary closure" (Scherer, 2013). For example, stayers may reach a conclusion about the favorability of a TE before they reach a conclusion on the best possibility of action after the TE. This may suggest that some processes stop occurring before others. Research exploring the ordering of different processes is needed to understand how TEs affect stayers over time.

Second, TET is not constrained to who is leaving the organization. For example, previous models about the effects of TEs have focused mainly on leadership departures (e.g., Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007; Bartunek et al., 2008; Shapiro et al., 2016) or peer turnover (Bartunek et al., 2008). We expand this view by suggesting that an initial TE can occur at any organizational level (CEOs, supervisors, team members, subordinates, structurally equivalent individuals in other departments, and so on) and impact subsequent outcomes in any employee. For example, the departure of an important subordinate can affect later turnover of supervisors. Future research can explore the various connections among different types of leavers and subsequent TEs.

Third, although we have sought to articulate the key aspects of TET, we have not exhaustively explored the conditions under which the proposed relationships may hold. For example, future research should explore whether individual differences and configurations of the social context where a TE takes place may either exacerbate, reduce, or alter some of the relationships previously proposed. As one example, trait negative affect (NA) is an individual difference that reflects stable underlying negative dispositions, stronger emotional responses, and more negative experiences of events (Hampson, 2012). Affective experiences can serve as key pieces of information that individuals consider when interpreting and reacting to relevant organizational events (van den Bos, 2003). Individuals high in trait NA are more likely to perceive a TE as negative for themselves because experienced negative emotions are more likely to be associated with negative perceptions of TE favorability in uncertain conditions (Grandey, Tam, & Brauburger, 2002). Future research should explore whether this or other moderators could change the effects described in our model.

Finally, we need to acknowledge that TET is a middle-range theory that draws from and contributes to the more general EST. In defining middle-range theories, Merton (1957, p. 10) described two general ways to advance theory: "through special theories adequate to limited ranges of social data, and through the evolution of a more general conceptual scheme adequate to *consolidate* groups of special theories." In this scheme, TET is a "special theory" (falling under the "middle-range theory" label) that specifically applies to the turnover phenomenon, whereas EST might be thought of a more "general conceptual scheme" that lends cohesiveness to a broader set of event-oriented theories and that share key assumptions and boundary conditions. We would expect to see additional theories devoted to specific types of events, provided, of course, that other types of events are theoretically important and meaningful (e.g., Crawford, Thompson, & Ashforth, 2019; Leigh & Melwani, 2019; Lerman, Munyon, & Carr, 2020; Oreg, Bartunek, Lee, & Do, 2018).

6.4 | Guidelines for research

Studying TEs poses unique challenges for empirical research. Below, we offer suggestions for TET research in terms of measurement, data collection, and data analysis.

6.4.1 | Suggestions for construct measurement

Because of its explicit event focus, constructs should be measured at the event level. This is a different focus than traditional feature-oriented research, but in event-centric research the main unit of measurement should be the TE. For example, stayers could be asked about the last TE in the unit, and questions would center around experiences of that TE. In addition, it might be possible to track specific organizational responses and changes made in response to specific TEs. Finally, past research has commonly used interview and survey methodologies that directly ask for perceptions of organizational events to capture event-level constructs.

The key constructs of TET occur at different moments in time and with different durations. Future research should develop scales to reliably capture these constructs, but more importantly, define the most appropriate strategies to capture them. For example, in studies trying to capture short-term sensemaking processes, TE attention might be captured in experiments, using techniques such as eye tracking; in field research, more traditional scales (that need to be developed) may be more appropriate in order to capture the construct as soon as it occurs or to assess exactly when a TE captured the attention of stayers. Similarly, because TE favorability involves an interpretation following TE attention, scales could be developed to capture the nature and timing of the TE favorability assessment. Of course, there are many additional facets to studying TEs, so specific methods should be adapted to appropriately study a given theoretical question.

It would also be helpful to measure the same event-related construct at multiple points in time. This would provide insight into how the effect of the event might change over time. Because of the possibility of decays in TE strength over time, researchers should consider measuring the same constructs at multiple points in time. This can help them understand how perceptions might change over time. Although the specific time periods to include will vary depending on the specific phenomenon being studied, past research in a given domain can provide insight into the most appropriate measurement strategy.

6.4.2 | Suggestions for research design and data collection

There are a variety of different research design and data collection options in order to explore the elements of TET. One strategy would involve the use of exit surveys and exit interviews that directly ask leavers and stayers questions about the TE. When conducted, most organizations consider only leavers in exit interviews. This enhanced use of exit surveys would not only be a valuable source of information to researchers but also to practitioners in search for better data to manage turnover and retention. For example, the research of Brockner and colleagues (Brockner et al., 1986, 1987, 1990, 1992, 1994) showed the promise of using exit surveys with stayers to capture the effects of layoffs. Unfortunately, we are not aware of other studies taking this approach for studying the effects of voluntary turnover, or the combination of either voluntary/involuntary turnover creating voluntary/involuntary turnover. This is a missed opportunity and could be used to study many of TET's processes.

When one is studying event-oriented phenomenon, there are a range of potential other ways to collect data about TET constructs. For example, one of the advantages of studying TEs is that they leave traces. There are many potential sources of these traces, including traditional media (e.g., newspapers and magazines), social media (e.g., Twitter and Facebook), company records (e.g., press releases, annual reports, email, organizational charts, and job descriptions),

and formal or public reports (e.g., regulatory filings and technical reports). In addition, because events are discrete and often memorable, unobtrusive methods (Bouchard, 1976; Webb & Weick, 1979) or experience sampling methodologies (Fisher & To, 2012) are possible. For example, wearable sensors (Chaffin et al., 2015) might capture real-time reactions and interactions among employees before and after the announcement or the occurrence of a TE. This could provide insight into TE strength, whether an event captures the attention of organizational members, and the depth of interpretation processes.

Laboratory experiments (forcing a team member to leave the team) and natural field experiments (teams where a TE is likely to occur in the future) can be utilized to assess the relative importance of factors affecting TE attention and TE favorability. In these situations, researchers could test some of the propositions presented here by manipulating the levels of TE strength or TE favorability. Although it is difficult for researchers to know when a TE is going to occur in an applied setting, natural field experiments might be useful to learn more about how individuals and teams react to the occurrence of different types of TEs. In addition, experimental designs might enable researchers to recreate or simulate specific types of TEs and model specific conditions that qualify TEs. For example, if team member turnover is an important voluntary or involuntary TE, directly manipulating these kinds of TEs, varying the strength of the event (in terms of novelty, disruption, and criticality), and exploring the impact on TE attention or TE favorability might help lab studies test the causality of TET's proposed relationships.

Finally, qualitative process-oriented studies can be used to better understand reactions to TEs. This research design is promising because it allows one to focus on other related topics that fall beyond the scope of our theory (e.g., collective turnover). For example, using a qualitative inductive approach, Bartunek et al. (2008) studied three cases to understand the process that create conditions for multiple individuals leaving an organization. Qualitative approaches can help enrich our understanding of complex psychological processes.

6.4.3 | Suggestions for data analysis

If multiple individuals evaluate the same event, cross-classified multilevel models (Browne, Goldstein, & Rasbash, 2001; Goldstein, 1994) can help account for sources of variance from multiple raters nested in groups at multiple times. This analytical tool is available in some statistical packages (Mplus, R) and provides an appropriate technique to analyze the complex data that might be required to test TET.

TEs can create discontinuities or become natural "treatments" experienced by organizations. Discontinuous growth models (Bliese & Lang, 2016) are particularly capable of testing changes in patterns of behavior when the point of discontinuity is known. Similarly, researchers may use analytical tools such as regression discontinuity designs to study the causal effects of TEs by comparing observations lying close to the moment of the event (Hahn, Todd, & Van der Klaauw, 2001). In addition, recent advancements in social network analysis (i.e., resilience analysis) provides new tools to evaluate network structures before and after social network membership changes. These advancements create new possibilities to collect and analyze data related to the effects of key organizational events such as TEs. For example, Chen and Garg (2018) studied pass networks in NBA basketball teams after star performers temporarily leave their teams. This highlights how researchers might explore network-level changes created by TEs.

6.5 | Practical implications

TET can be particularly helpful for practitioners as it describes a phenomenon that is relatively common in organizational settings. For example, Morgeson and DeRue (2006) found that over 20% of disruptive events occurring in a team involved "personnel" issues, of which turnover is a key type of personnel event. Management researchers have also suggested that, for example, CEO's TEs could create new organizational capabilities (Cao, Maruping, & Takeuchi, 2006), produce concerns over job security, status, and power (Kesner & Dalton, 1994), or make other top management

team members to leave the organization too (Messersmith, Lee, Guthrie, & Ji, 2013). A key learning for organizations is that TEs can have an impact on those who remain. TEs could potentially explain significant changes in organizations.

TET offers a more detailed explanation of the mechanisms that link turnover to more turnover. These mechanisms might be used by practitioners to effectively manage turnover consequences, identifying the multiplicity of forms by which a TE can affect stayers. Considering these elements can guide practitioners to design more proactive ways to restrain further turnover when an initial TE occurs in unplanned (e.g., when a star performer leaves the firm) or more deliberate situations (e.g., a poor performer is terminated). Organizational actions may be taken at different stages of TET. For example, organizations could identify what TE characteristics are more likely to activate TE attention in their own industries, business lines, or hierarchical level (e.g., what is the “normal” level of turnover for employees in this position). Alternatively, organizations may want to identify the factors that drive interpretations of TEs. This would require a deeper knowledge about their employee’s career objectives, the explanations given to TEs for stayers, and the specific knowledge employees have regarding organizational actions when a TE occurs. Similarly, future studies should evaluate what managerial actions can be taken or what type of messages should be delivered to those who remain (e.g., accounts) to ameliorate potential negative effects of TEs. We believe TET provides a useful framework to guide customized and proactive organizational actions.

7 | CONCLUSION

Understanding the complex intricacies and connections among TEs can expand our ability to explain and predict future organizational turnover. TET not only explains how TEs are connected, but also expands turnover research by considering the unexplored consequences of TEs for other actors in the organization. In doing so, we provide several propositions that we hope will help guide future research. TET invites researchers to observe turnover phenomena with a different and more dynamic perspective, embracing the complexity and richness of TEs within organizations.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Although there are instances in which there may be ambiguity in the voluntariness of a given turnover event (e.g., voluntary resignations that are in fact forced), voluntary and involuntary turnover are distinct conceptually. For clarity of exposition, we treat these two types of turnover separately.
- ² Scholars have used the term “controlled” information processing to refer to psychological activities that are more deliberative and related to conscious streams of thought, rather than more automatic or unconscious processing of individuals’ experiences.

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