

# The Effect of Eco-Anxiety on Sustainability-Related Nonprofit Organizations Employees Turnover Intentions



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## Introduction

The nonprofit sector faces a troubling turnover rate of 19%, significantly higher than the all-industry average of 12% (Strub, 2022). Within the environmental nonprofit (NPO) community, the term "eco-anxiety" has gained recognition. Defined as a chronic fear of environmental doom (APA, 2017; EcoAmerica, 2017), eco-anxiety may explain the high turnover rates. However, existing research primarily focuses on measurement (Hogg, 2017; Ágoston, 2022) rather than its impact on NPO employees. This paper proposes a reconceptualization of eco-anxiety as mission-based rather than practical anxiety. We hypothesize that eco-anxiety influences turnover intentions, with factors like emotional labor, organizational culture, and coping mechanisms playing mediating and moderating roles. Our qualitative approach aims to understand how eco-anxiety affects NPO employees and their decisions to stay or leave. We challenge the notion of eco-anxiety as practical anxiety, suggesting it revolves around mission-related concerns. While practical anxiety aids in decision-making, eco-anxiety pertains to existential questions about the viability of one's cause. Understanding eco-anxiety's distinct nature is crucial in addressing the rising turnover rates in environmental NPOs.

**Research Question:** How does eco-anxiety, perceived at the individual, organizational, and interpersonal levels, influence turnover intentions among environmental nonprofit employees, and what are the mediating and moderating factors at play?

## Methods

This study employs a **qualitative research approach**, utilizing **semi-structured interviews** as the primary method of data collection. A diverse sample of current and resigned environmental nonprofit employees will be purposively selected based on various criteria including experiences, core values, extrinsic and intrinsic motivators, and social identities.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with selected participants, focusing on gathering rich qualitative data regarding their experiences, perceptions, and interactions within their respective organizations. Each interview will include questions addressing demographics, conservation commitment, social identity, leader-member exchange, job demands and resources, and conservation of resources.

The qualitative data obtained from these interviews will be analyzed using **thematic analysis**, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and insights related to the influence of eco-anxiety on turnover intentions among environmental nonprofit employees.

## Theoretical Framework

This study employs a multidimensional theoretical framework to investigate the nexus between eco-anxiety and turnover intentions among environmental nonprofit (NPO) employees. Drawing upon established theories in organizational behavior and psychology, we seek to unravel the intricate interplay of individual, organizational, and interpersonal factors contributing to this phenomenon.

Firstly, we adopt the **Job Demands-Resources Model (JDR)** (Bakker & Demerouti, 2001) to understand eco-anxiety within environmental NPOs. Emotional labor emerges as a key job demand, where employees cope with the chronic fear of environmental doom, potentially straining their existing social identities (Hochschild, 1983). However, resources such as organizational support, personal coping mechanisms, and distractions can mitigate these demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2001).

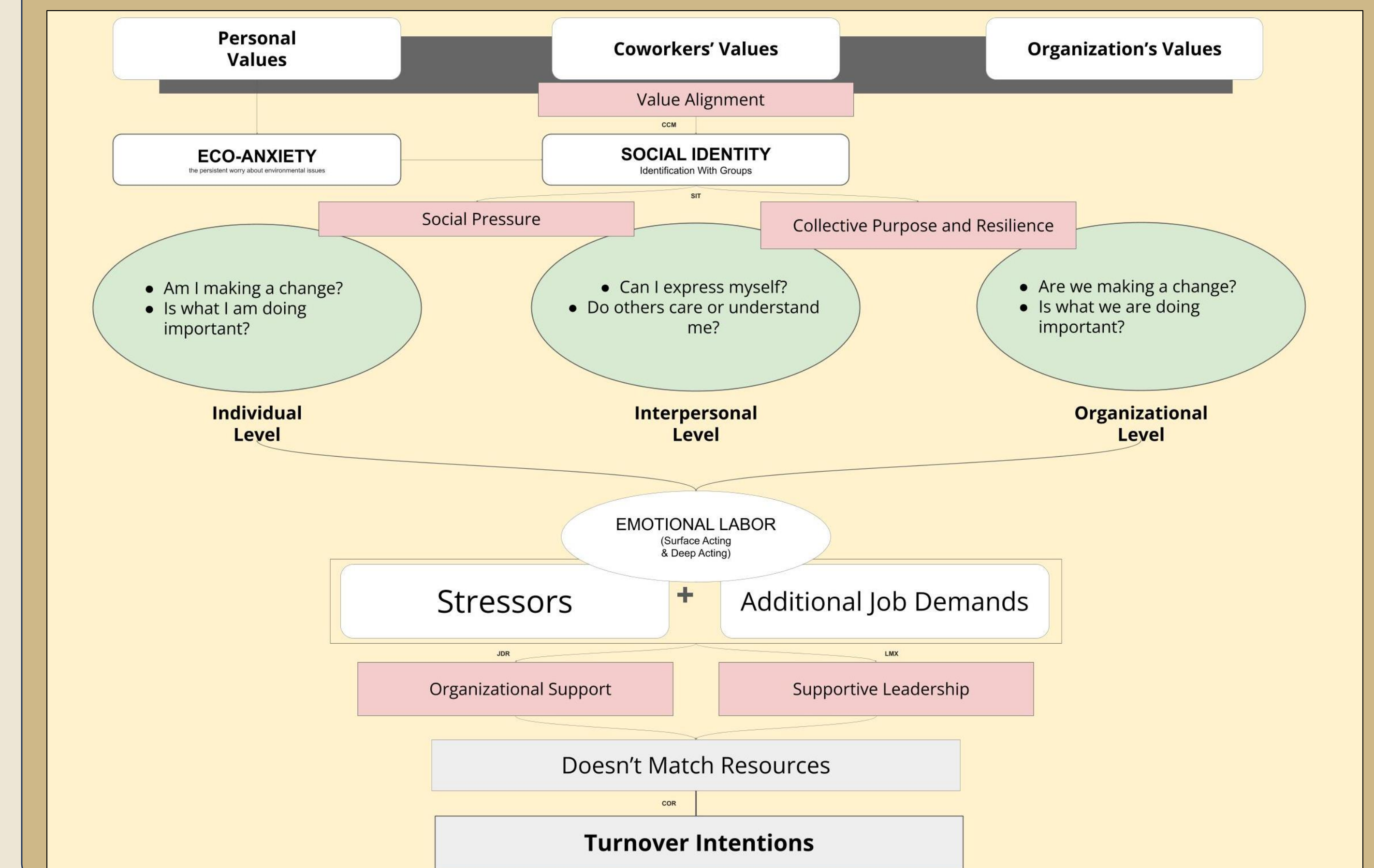
Secondly, we integrate principles from the **Social Identity Theory (SIT)** (Tajfel & Turner, 1989) to explore how alignment between individual and organizational values influences turnover intentions. Employees' intrinsic motivation, rooted in core values (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and social identities (Knippenberg, 2000), is strengthened when it resonates with the organization's mission and leadership (Zubair, 2021; Xuecheng, 2022). This alignment fosters commitment and resilience, buffering the negative effects of eco-anxiety (Tajfel & Turner, 1989).

Moreover, we incorporate the **Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Model** (Graen, 1975) to underscore the role of supportive leadership in mitigating eco-anxiety. Approachable leaders provide understanding and empowerment, reducing turnover intentions by cultivating a sense of value and purpose among employees.

Finally, we consider the **Conservation Commitment Model** (Meyer, 2002) to elucidate the relationship between personal and organizational values. When individual values align with the organization's mission of environmental protection, employees exhibit higher commitment and reduced turnover intentions.

## Conceptual Model

Our research aims to explore eco-anxiety within environmental nonprofit (NPO) employees, reframing it as a mission-related stressor rather than practical anxiety. We anticipate that this unique form of anxiety disrupts coping mechanisms, leading to heightened turnover intentions. By examining individual, organizational, and interpersonal factors, we seek to uncover the root causes of eco-anxiety and its impact on employees. We hypothesize that receiving support and resources from coworkers, leaders, and organizational sources may mitigate turnover intentions, fostering commitment and alignment with organizational values. Ultimately, our study strives to inform the creation of supportive work environments for environmental NPO employees, enhancing retention rates and empowering the workforce.



## References

