

Never Fear, Hope is Here: A Quantitative Analysis of Public Accountants' Hope During Busy Season

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Retention Issues in Accounting

- Around 17% of accountants and auditors have left firms over past two years (Ellis, 2022).
- Number of accounting graduates has dropped by 9% over the past decade (Howard, 2023).
- Retaining and recruiting qualified accountants were two of the top issues for the next five years (AICPA & CIMA, 2022).

Behavioral Accounting Literature

Research has shown that the profession is stressful through high burnout levels, which lead to high employee turnover (Herda & Lavelle, 2012).

Lopatto (2022) found that around 15% of employees leave public accounting firms each year and predicted an increase if proper measures are not taken.

A lack of research surrounding positive organizational behaviors (POB) within the context of public accounting firms.

My goal is to take an initial step toward investigating hope within public accounting firms, which may reveal positive outcomes and lead to further investigation of POB within public accounting firms.

Research Questions

1. Does a public accountant's hope before busy season impact their likelihood of leaving the firm by the end of busy season?
2. Does a public accountant's hope before busy season impact their behavioral reaction through well-being and burnout by the end of busy season?
3. Does a public accountant's hope change from the beginning to the end of busy season?

What is Hope?

The “perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways” (Snyder, 2002, p. 249).

Pathways

The ways to achieve your goals.

Agency

The motivation to achieve your goals.

Hope in Organizational Behavior Literature

Positive Organizational Behavior (POB)

- Consists of confidence, hope, optimism, subjective well-being, and emotional intelligence (CHOSE).
- Construct must be positive, measurable, manageable, and malleable (Luthans, 2002).

Psychological Capital (PsyCap)

- Includes hope, optimism, efficacy, and resilience.
- Construct must be developmental and manageable (Avey et al., 2009).

Hope in Organizational Behavior Literature

Authors	Hope Dimension Measured	Scale Used	Predictor Variable and Source	Outcome Variable and Source	Moderator/Mediator Variables and Source	Sample Characteristics
Reichard et al. (2013)	Overall	Trait & State*	Hope	Work Performance & Employee Well-Being	Gender & Study Location	133 effect sizes across 45 studies consisting of 11,139 employees
Avey et al. (2009)	Overall	State	Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, Optimism (E) (PsyCap)	Intentions to Quit, Job Search Behaviors (E)	Stress (E)	360 working adults from Midwest area of U.S.
Avey et al. (2011)	Overall	State	Hope, Efficacy, Optimism, Resilience (E) (PsyCap)	Well-Being (E)	Stress, Anxiety (E)	Study 1: 1,316 working adults in Midwest area of U.S. Study 2: 172 college seniors from Midwestern university in U.S.
Ozyilmaz (2019)	Will, Ways, and Overall	State	Hope and Human Capital (E)	Task Performance (S) and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (P)	Job Engagement (E)	170 triads of employees, supervisors, and peers from 15 different organizations in Southern Turkey

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

Hobfoll's (1989, p. 1) COR theory is based on "how people strive to retain, protect, and build resources" and implies that the loss of a resource may lead to stress.

Snyder's (2002) classic hope theory denotes hope as a resource that can be gained or lost over time.

Challenge appraisal – when the person determines that the stressors motivate them to achieve their goals.

Hindrance appraisal – when the person deems the stressor as debilitating.

Dependent Variables

Employee Well-Being

- Includes “manageable workload, personal control over the job, support from colleagues and supervisors, positive relationships at work, a reasonably clear role” (Jain et al., 2009, p. 258).
- Significantly related to burnout and intention to change occupations in accounting (Çollaku et al., 2023; Hameli et al., 2024).

Turnover Intentions

- Ample research within the context of public accounting firms (Kohlmeyer et al., 2017; Nouri & Parker, 2013).
- Auditor’s resilience is directly related to burnout and indirectly related to turnover intentions (Smith et al., 2020).
- Hitchcock (2021) calls for researchers to study POB within the accounting profession.

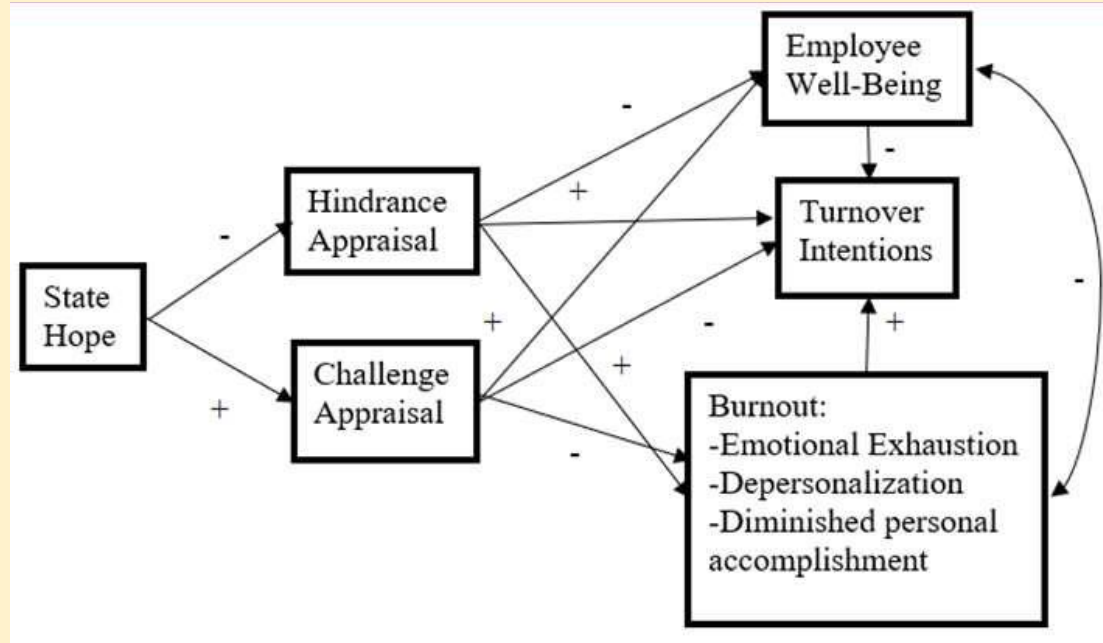
Burnout

- 3 components
 - Depersonalization
 - Emotional exhaustion
 - Diminished personal accomplishments
- Positively related to turnover intentions within public accounting firms (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Herda & Lavelle, 2012; Nouri & Parker, 2020).

Hypotheses

H1:	A public accountant's state hope at the beginning of busy season significantly differs from their state hope at the end of busy season.
H2:	State hope is (a) positively related to challenge appraisals, and (b) negatively related to hindrance appraisals.
H3:	Challenge appraisal mediates the indirect effect of state hope on public accountants' (a) well-being, (b) turnover intentions, and (c) burnout.
H4:	Hindrance appraisal mediates the indirect effect of state hope on public accountants' (a) well-being, (b) turnover intentions, and (c) burnout.
H5:	Burnout is negatively related to well-being.
H6:	Burnout is positively related to turnover intentions.
H7:	Well-being is negatively related to turnover intentions.

Theoretical Model



Recruitment and Participants

- Contacts in public accounting firms
 - Southern region of United States
- State accounting societies within United States
- Public accountants
 - Tax
 - Assurance
 - Consulting
- Working during busy season
 - January 1st to April 15th
- Range from staff to partner level

Proposed Methodology

Time 1 (Before Busy Season)

- Demographic information.
- State Hope

Time 2 (After Busy Season)

- State Hope
- Appraised job stressors
- Outcome variables
 - Well-being
 - Turnover Intentions
 - Burnout

Intended Measurement Scales

Name of Scale	Construct	Authors	Number of Items	Multidimensional?
State Hope Scale	State Hope	Snyder et al., 1996	6 items	Yes: -Pathways (3 items) -Agency (3 items)
Challenge Stressors	Challenge Appraisal	LePine et al., 2016	3 items	No
Hindrance Stressors	Hindrance Appraisal	LePine et al., 2016	3 items	No
General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)	Employee Well-Being	Goldberg, 1972	12 items	No
Turnover Intentions Scale	Turnover Intentions	Michaels & Spector, 1982	3 items	No
Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)	Burnout	Maslach & Jackson, 1981	22 items	Yes: -Emotional Exhaustion (9 items) -Depersonalization (5 items) -Diminished Personal Accomplishments (8 items)

Intended Contributions

Retention Issues

- Shed light on how positive attributes impact retention.
- Informative for practitioners to better understand and resolve retention issues within public accounting firms.

Linking Research Streams

Connect and extend the behavioral accounting and positive organizational behavior research streams.

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

- Applying hope as a predictor for stress appraisals.
- Theoretical model supports the foundations of COR theory.



Thank you!

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