

HARD LIVING VERSUS SLOW LIVING: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF GEOGRAPHICAL LIFE ORIENTATION IN INVOLUNTARY EMPLOYEE TRANSFER

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Abstract

Inter-regional employee transfer is a routine human resource management instrument in organizations with extensive distribution networks, yet workforce-planning systems generally emphasize technical-administrative fit while overlooking employees' psychological orientation toward relocation. This article introduces Geographical Life Orientation (GLO) as a conceptual construct that captures a value orientation ranging from Hard Living to Slow Living in response to involuntary transfer. Unlike place attachment, which concerns affective bonding with place, and mobility willingness, which is usually examined under voluntary mobility, GLO addresses value priorities under organization-imposed geographical mobility. Using a theory-synthesis design, the article integrates Conservation of Resources Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Psychological Contract Theory, and Person-Environment Fit Theory, extended as Person-Location Fit. The synthesis yields four GLO sub-dimensions and five propositions linking geographical orientation to basic psychological needs, structural misfit, resource-threat appraisal, and post-relocation work responses. The contribution is theoretical and propositional, providing a foundation for scale development, longitudinal testing, and more psychologically informed workforce planning.

Keywords: *Conservation Of Resources; Geographical Life Orientation; Person-Environment Fit; Psychological Contract; Self-Determination Theory*

1. INTRODUCTION

Inter-regional employee transfer is a routine instrument of human resource management in organizations with geographically dispersed operations. In national networks, employees may be reassigned across branches, regions, or operating units to fill vacancies, balance staffing requirements, develop careers, and maintain organizational flexibility. In practice, such decisions are commonly evaluated through technical-administrative criteria: competence, staffing needs, position availability, operational efficiency, and formal compliance. These criteria are necessary, but they do not fully explain why two employees with comparable competence and career status may respond very differently to the same transfer decision.

The problem becomes particularly visible when relocation is involuntary. An employee may comply formally by reporting to the new unit, completing assigned work, and

avoiding explicit resistance, while simultaneously reducing psychological investment in the new role. Organizational research has long recognized that dissatisfaction may generate not only exit or voice but also loyalty and neglect, with neglect being especially difficult to observe through routine administrative indicators (Farrell, 1983; Hirschman, 1970). Psychological Contract Theory provides an additional explanation: relocation can be interpreted as a breach of implicit expectations that the organization will consider the employee's family life, residence stability, and personal circumstances when making placement decisions (Rousseau, 1989; Rousseau et al., 2018). A transfer can therefore be administratively valid yet psychologically costly.

Place attachment research shows that people differ in the extent to which place, family proximity, and community belonging are embedded in their identity (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Wächter, 2024). Mobility research likewise demonstrates that family arrangements, location-specific capital, and the salience of partner and career roles shape willingness to relocate (Abraham et al., 2019; Skora et al., 2024; van der Velde et al., 2017). However, these literatures do not directly capture the value orientation that governs how employees interpret organization-imposed relocation. Place attachment primarily concerns affective bonds with place, whereas mobility willingness is commonly studied in contexts in which individuals retain meaningful choice over whether to move. In involuntary organizational transfer, the locus of decision shifts from the individual to the employer; the employee's central task is not choosing mobility but interpreting and adapting to it.

Person-Environment Fit Theory offers a strong general framework for understanding the consequences of congruence and incongruence between personal characteristics and environmental demands (Edwards, 2008; van Vianen, 2018). Yet established fit domains such as person-organization, person-job, and person-group fit rarely treat geographical location as an independent dimension of fit. This omission matters in organizations whose workforce systems depend on repeated geographical redistribution. Contemporary evidence also indicates that location specificity remains consequential even when work becomes more flexible, because employees continue to evaluate career opportunities in relation to particular places, relationships, and locally embedded resources (Teodorovicz et al., 2024).

Recent Indonesian management studies reinforce the importance of considering psychological meaning, contextual values, and lived experience rather than relying solely on formal economic or administrative variables. Research involving has examined, among other issues, the role of psychological factors in financial planning (Aslam et al., 2024), employee competence and motivation in performance (Haeruddin et al., 2026), work-family conflict and job stress (Alam et al., 2026), and subjective lifestyle meanings in urban Makassar (Musa et al., 2025). Other studies in the same research stream show that local managerial behavior is shaped by value-laden interpretations of sustainability, identity, place, and adaptation (Aslam et al., 2023; Putra et al., 2024, 2025, 2026). Although these studies address different substantive domains, together they underscore a broader methodological

point relevant to employee transfer: organizational behavior cannot be fully understood without accounting for the meanings individuals attach to their social and geographical context.

This article therefore proposes Geographical Life Orientation (GLO) as a conceptual construct representing a relatively stable value orientation toward the trade-off between geographical stability and career mobility. GLO is conceptualized as a continuum from Hard Living Orientation, in which professional mobility and career advancement receive relatively greater priority, to Slow Living Orientation, in which residential stability, family proximity, and continuity of community ties receive relatively greater priority. The construct is not intended to classify one orientation as superior to the other. Rather, it identifies a dimension of value heterogeneity that can become consequential when organizational mobility demands are imposed on employees.

The article has two objectives. First, it develops the conceptual domain and sub-dimensions of GLO by integrating Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Psychological Contract Theory, and Person-Environment Fit Theory. Second, it derives five propositions explaining how GLO may influence post-relocation satisfaction, commitment, and performance through psychological-need mechanisms, Person-Location Fit, and resource-threat appraisal. The intended contribution is theoretical: to provide a coherent conceptual basis for instrument development and future empirical testing in organizations that rely on domestic, involuntary employee transfer.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a theory-synthesis approach, one of the recognized designs for conceptual research in management. Theory synthesis is appropriate when a phenomenon cannot be adequately explained by a single theoretical vocabulary and the research objective is to integrate previously separate perspectives into a coherent explanatory framework (Jaakkola, 2020). The present article synthesizes COR Theory, Person-Environment Fit Theory, SDT, and Psychological Contract Theory to explain variation in employees' psychological responses to involuntary domestic relocation.

Literature selection was purposive rather than systematic. Sources were chosen for their conceptual relevance to three intersecting domains: employee relocation and mobility, geographical or place-based orientation, and psychological-organizational responses to change. Priority was given to foundational theoretical works such as Hobfoll (1989), Rousseau (1989), and Ryan and Deci (2000) and to contemporary studies that clarify recent developments in fit, relocation, resources, and mobility. Google Scholar and other academic discovery tools were used with combinations of terms including employee relocation, involuntary job transfer, conservation of resources, person-environment fit, self-

determination theory, psychological contract, place attachment, geographical mobility, and location-specific capital.

The conceptual analysis proceeded in three stages. First, gap identification compared place attachment, mobility willingness, and Person-Environment Fit research to locate an unresolved conceptual space: a value orientation specifically governing responses to involuntary geographical mobility. Second, cross-theoretical synthesis aligned the four principal theories at different but complementary levels of explanation. SDT was used at the level of basic psychological needs; COR Theory at the level of resource acquisition, protection, and threat; Person-Environment Fit at the structural level of congruence between the individual and assignment context; and Psychological Contract Theory at the relational-emotional level of perceived reciprocal obligations. Third, proposition derivation translated the synthesis into empirically testable relationships. This logic follows the proposition-building principle that theoretical statements should identify clear construct relationships and explain the mechanism supporting those relationships (Cornelissen, 2017, 2025).

Because the article is conceptual, it does not involve primary data, sampling, measurement instruments, or statistical analysis. The method is reported to make the design and inferential process explicit and to distinguish theoretical propositions from empirically verified findings. Future research must therefore validate the GLO construct psychometrically and test the proposed relationships in organizational samples.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Theoretical Foundations and the Conceptual Gap

COR Theory begins from the premise that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect resources they value (Hobfoll, 1989). Resource loss and the threat of loss are psychologically powerful, and resource depletion can initiate defensive conservation strategies. In relocation, threatened resources may include locally embedded social networks, family support, role familiarity, community identity, and the competence that comes from knowing the local work ecology. Subsequent developments in COR Theory emphasize that resources tend to travel in caravans and that contextual conditions can facilitate or obstruct resource accumulation (Hobfoll et al., 2018). This logic helps explain why the same geographical transfer can be experienced as a manageable transition by one employee and a major resource threat by another.

The GLO perspective extends COR reasoning by proposing that individuals differ systematically in how much of their valued resource portfolio is anchored to the place of origin. Employees closer to the Slow Living pole are expected to hold a larger proportion of valued resources in family proximity, community continuity, local identity, and stable residence. For them, relocation threatens a concentrated resource bundle. Employees closer to the Hard Living pole may place relatively more value on portable resources career capital, professional networks, adaptability, and opportunities for advancement and may therefore

perceive relocation as a setting for resource investment rather than primarily as loss. COR Theory thus explains what is threatened and why threat intensity varies across employees.

Person-Environment Fit Theory provides the structural layer of the model. Its core proposition is that outcomes depend on the alignment between personal characteristics and environmental attributes rather than on either side in isolation (Edwards, 2008; van Vianen, 2018). Fit is also dynamic: it can change over time as employees reinterpret needs, environments, and future possibilities (Boon & Biron, 2016; Guan et al., 2021; Jansen & Shipp, 2019). The present article introduces Person-Location Fit as a specific extension of this framework: the degree of congruence between an employee's geographical value orientation and the location demands imposed by an organizational assignment.

SDT explains a deeper motivational mechanism. Human functioning is supported by the basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and work research indicates that satisfaction of these needs is associated with higher-quality motivation and well-being (Deci et al., 2017). A Hard Living orientation is conceptually more compatible with interpreting mobility as an opportunity to exercise autonomy through career choice and to demonstrate competence in new environments. A Slow Living orientation places relatively greater weight on relatedness sustained connection with family, community, and familiar social worlds. In involuntary relocation, relatedness can be frustrated even when the employee remains professionally competent.

Psychological Contract Theory adds an important relational-emotional dimension to understanding employee responses to organizational transfer decisions. Employees develop beliefs about reciprocal obligations that extend beyond the explicit terms of formal employment contracts and include implicit expectations regarding fairness, organizational consideration, support, and respect for significant personal circumstances (Rousseau, 1989). When a transfer decision is perceived to disregard a long-standing expectation that the organization will recognize important family responsibilities, residential stability, or personal life commitments, employees may interpret the decision as a psychological contract breach or even as a psychological contract violation. Such perceptions can generate disappointment, distrust, emotional withdrawal, and reduced willingness to invest discretionary effort in the new assignment. The dynamic phase model of psychological contracts further explains that major organizational disruptions can shift the employment relationship from a relatively stable maintenance phase toward renegotiation, repair, or, in some cases, deterioration (Rousseau et al., 2018). This mechanism is likely to become especially salient when assignment demands strongly conflict with an employee's geographical orientation, because relocation may be interpreted not merely as an administrative decision but also as evidence that the organization has failed to honor previously assumed relational obligations.

Table 1. Theoretical Foundations and the Unresolved Conceptual Space

Framework	Primary focus	Contribution to the GLO model	Unresolved issue addressed by GLO
Psychology of management (Gilbreth, 1914)	The individual worker's mind as an object of managerial attention	Provides the historical premise that placement should consider individuality and welfare	Individuality in geographical value priorities, beyond capability and training
Labor process analysis (Braverman, 1974)	Managerial control; separation of conception from execution	Explains the asymmetry of agency in involuntary transfer	Subjective variation in employee responses to the same managerial decision
COR Theory (Hobfoll, 1989)	Threat and protection of valued resources	Explains why relocation can trigger defensive conservation and reduced work investment	Why location-specific resource threat differs systematically across employees
Person-Environment Fit (Edwards, 2008)	Congruence between individual and environment	Explains the structural consequences of misfit	Geographical location as an explicit dimension of fit
Place attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010)	Affective and identity bonds with place	Explains emotional person-place connection	Value priority in career decisions, beyond affective attachment
Mobility research (Abraham et al., 2019; van der Velde et al., 2017)	Willingness and constraints surrounding relocation	Shows the importance of family, roles, and location-specific capital	Involuntary transfer in which the organization controls the move
Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000)	Autonomy, competence, and relatedness	Explains basic psychological needs underlying mobility interpretation	Application of need priorities to geographical career trade-offs
Psychological Contract Theory (Rousseau, 1989)	Implicit reciprocal obligations	Explains relational reactions to perceived breach	Residence and family consideration as part of perceived implicit obligations

Source: Data Processed, 2026

3.2 Definition and Dimensions of Geographical Life Orientation

Geographical Life Orientation is defined here as a relatively stable value tendency to prioritize geographical proximity to family, community, and place of origin when evaluating career-related mobility. The construct is an orientation toward decision criteria, not a

measure of emotional attachment alone. An employee can be strongly attached to a hometown yet still accept frequent relocation because career advancement is prioritized; conversely, an employee with only moderate emotional attachment to place may resist relocation because family continuity and residential stability dominate the decision calculus.

GLO is modeled as a continuum rather than a rigid binary type. Hard Living Orientation describes the pole at which career mobility, advancement, and professional exploration are assigned comparatively high value. Slow Living Orientation describes the pole at which residential stability, family proximity, and continuity of community life are assigned comparatively high value. Most employees are expected to fall between these poles, and an individual's location on the continuum may shift with life-course changes such as marriage, caregiving responsibility, home ownership, or children's schooling. Therefore, GLO should ultimately be operationalized as a continuous latent construct rather than a dichotomous category.

Four sub-dimensions are proposed as reflective manifestations of GLO: Proximity Value, Rootedness Index, Career Sacrifice Threshold, and Mobility Tolerance. Proximity Value concerns the weight placed on physical closeness to immediate family and the community of origin. Rootedness Index concerns the degree to which identity and social embeddedness are anchored in the home location. Career Sacrifice Threshold captures the maximum personal and family sacrifice an individual is willing to tolerate for professional advancement. Mobility Tolerance captures adaptive capacity and subjective tolerance for the uncertainty generated by geographical moves. Together, these dimensions distinguish the value architecture of GLO from neighboring constructs such as place attachment and general willingness to move.

Table 2. Proposed Sub-Dimensions of Geographical Life Orientation

Sub-dimension	Conceptual definition	Hard Living pole	Slow Living pole
Proximity Value	Value assigned to physical closeness to immediate family and community of origin	Distance is an acceptable career consequence	Family proximity is a primary career consideration
Rootedness Index	Degree to which identity and social embeddedness are anchored in the home location	Social networks can be rebuilt relatively easily	Separation from the home community threatens identity continuity
Career Sacrifice Threshold	Maximum personal or family sacrifice tolerated for career advancement	Higher threshold for sacrifice in pursuit of career opportunity	Lower threshold when career advancement threatens family stability

Sub-dimension	Conceptual definition	Hard Living pole	Slow Living pole
Mobility Tolerance	Adaptive capacity for uncertainty associated with geographical movement	Relocation is interpreted as learning and exploration	Relocation is more readily appraised as threat and disruption

Source: Data Processed, 2026

3.3 Conceptual Model and Propositions

The proposed model positions GLO as the starting point of a layered process through which relocation is interpreted. SDT explains which basic psychological needs become salient; Person-Location Fit captures structural congruence or misfit; COR Theory explains resource-threat appraisal and resource recovery; and Psychological Contract Theory explains how perceived disregard for personal circumstances can alter the employee-organization relationship. The model is propositional rather than empirically verified.

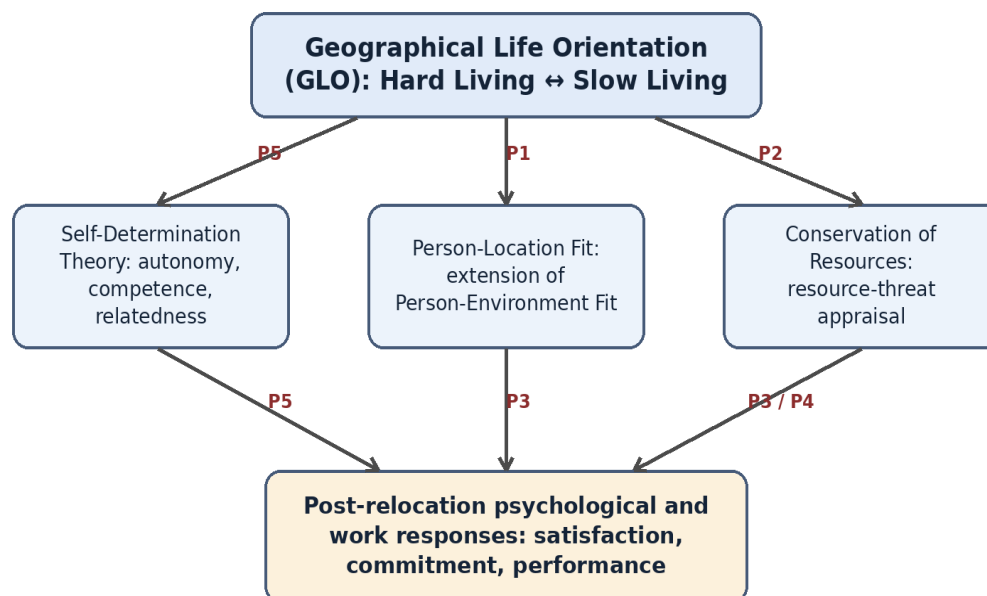


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Geographical Life Orientation and Post-Relocation Responses

Proposition 1 (P1). *The stronger an employee's Slow Living Orientation, the greater the Person-Location misfit expected when the employee is assigned far from the place of origin. This follows directly from fit logic: when geographical proximity and rootedness are highly valued, a distant assignment is structurally incongruent with the individual's value profile (Edwards, 2008).*

Proposition 2 (P2). *The stronger an employee's Slow Living Orientation, the higher the expected post-relocation resource-threat appraisal. Employees whose social, family, and identity resources are concentrated in the home location should perceive greater prospective and actual loss when relocation separates them from those resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018).*

Proposition 3 (P3). *Person-Location misfit and resource-threat appraisal jointly mediate the negative relationship between Slow Living Orientation and post-relocation satisfaction, commitment, and performance. Structural incongruence and perceived resource loss represent distinct but convergent mechanisms through which geographical orientation may be translated into work outcomes.*

Proposition 4 (P4). *Employees closer to the Hard Living pole are expected to rebuild and accumulate resources more rapidly after relocation than employees closer to the Slow Living pole; consequently, performance recovery should be faster, on average, for the former group when organizational support is comparable. This proposition is consistent with the temporal nature of fit and resource gain cycles (Boon & Biron, 2016; Jansen & Shipp, 2019).*

Proposition 5 (P5). *Relatedness need satisfaction mediates the relationship between Slow Living Orientation and resource-threat appraisal, whereas autonomy and competence satisfaction mediate the relationship between Hard Living Orientation and the appraisal of relocation as a growth opportunity. This proposition locates GLO differences at the level of basic psychological needs rather than treating them only as differences in resources or structural fit (Ryan & Deci, 2000).*

The propositions are intentionally framed as conceptual statements rather than hypotheses because they have not been tested in the present article. Their purpose is to specify mechanisms that can guide subsequent scale development and empirical modeling, including parallel and sequential mediation designs and longitudinal analyses of post-transfer adjustment.

3.4 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The first theoretical contribution is construct-level. GLO occupies a conceptual space between place attachment, career mobility, and person-environment fit. Place attachment explains affective bonds with place; mobility research explains willingness or constraints surrounding movement; GLO explains the value orientation through which an employee evaluates an organizationally imposed mobility demand. This distinction is particularly important in involuntary transfer because agency is asymmetrical: the organization initiates the move, while the employee interprets and responds to it.

The second contribution is the extension of fit theory through Person-Location Fit. Existing fit research has produced strong accounts of value congruence with organizations,

compatibility with job demands, and fit with work groups. Yet national network organizations also impose a spatial environment. Treating location as an analytically independent aspect of fit allows researchers to examine whether an otherwise suitable job becomes psychologically unsuitable because the assignment location conflicts with the employee's geographical values. This extension also aligns with evidence that location-specific capital and family configurations shape regional mobility decisions (Skora et al., 2024; van der Velde et al., 2017).

The third contribution is cross-theoretical integration. COR Theory explains the resource consequences of relocation; SDT explains why different resources and contexts satisfy different psychological needs; Person-Location Fit identifies the structural locus of congruence; and Psychological Contract Theory explains the relational meaning of an assignment that is perceived to violate implicit expectations. This synthesis is consistent with calls for theoretical triangulation in management research, where a phenomenon is better explained through complementary theoretical grammars than by forcing a single theory to carry all explanatory work (Cornelissen, 2025).

The model also has practical implications, but these should be interpreted cautiously. GLO is not proposed as a criterion for excluding employees from transfer opportunities or for labeling Slow Living employees as less committed. Such uses would risk unfair or discriminatory decision making. A more defensible application is diagnostic and supportive: once validated, a GLO measure could help organizations anticipate the type and intensity of support required after transfer. Employees with stronger place-based resource dependence may benefit from family-visit facilitation, structured social integration, relocation counseling, community orientation, or more transparent communication about assignment duration and future mobility.

In workforce planning, this implies supplementing rather than replacing technical-administrative criteria. Competence, organizational need, and staffing efficiency remain legitimate placement considerations. The conceptual claim is that successful implementation also depends on whether relocation creates severe psychological misfit or resource threat. Research on employee performance in Makassar has shown that competence remains a central predictor of performance (Haeruddin et al., 2026), while research on work-family conflict demonstrates that cross-domain demands can generate substantial stress (Alam et al., 2026). GLO links these concerns by asking when a technically competent employee may nevertheless experience a geographically induced disruption that weakens post-transfer adjustment.

4. CONCLUSION

This article proposes Geographical Life Orientation (GLO) as a conceptual construct explaining individual variation in the value placed on career mobility relative to geographical stability under involuntary employee transfer. GLO is positioned on a continuum from Hard Living to Slow Living and is reflected in four proposed sub-dimensions: Proximity Value, Rootedness Index, Career Sacrifice Threshold, and Mobility Tolerance.

By integrating COR Theory, SDT, Psychological Contract Theory, and an extension of Person-Environment Fit Theory into Person-Location Fit, the model explains four complementary mechanisms behind post-relocation variation: basic psychological needs, structural congruence, resource-threat appraisal, and perceived disruption of implicit reciprocal obligations. Five propositions translate this synthesis into relationships that can be subjected to empirical testing.

The contribution is theoretical and propositional rather than conclusive. The construct has not yet been psychometrically validated, and the propositions have not been tested statistically. Future research should therefore develop a GLO scale using established scale-development procedures; examine convergent and discriminant validity relative to place attachment, mobility willingness, and related constructs; test the proposed mediation paths in multi-organization samples; and use longitudinal designs to examine whether performance decline and recovery follow different trajectories across GLO profiles. Qualitative process research would also be valuable because proposition-based models can underrepresent temporal sensemaking and the lived complexity of relocation (Cornelissen, 2025).

If validated, GLO could enrich workforce-planning research by adding a neglected geographical-psychological layer to placement decisions. Its purpose would not be to determine who should or should not be transferred, but to improve understanding of why employees experience the same organizational mobility requirement differently and how organizations can design more proportionate, humane, and effective post-relocation support.

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