



RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND TALENT RETENTION IN INDIAN IT ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Employee retention is a strategic concern in knowledge-intensive information technology (IT) organizations because the loss of skilled employees can disrupt organizational knowledge, project continuity, team cohesion and innovation. This study examines the relationship between transformational leadership and talent retention among IT employees in Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu, India, with employee engagement examined as an explanatory mechanism. Drawing on transformational leadership theory and Social Exchange Theory, transformational leadership is represented by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was used with 379 valid responses obtained from IT employees through stratified sampling. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, covariance-based structural equation modelling and Hayes PROCESS analyses were used. Transformational leadership was perceived moderately positively ($M = 3.5008$, $SD = 0.54965$), while talent retention was also relatively favourable ($M = 3.5482$, $SD = 0.68869$). Transformational leadership was significantly correlated with talent retention ($r = .606$, $p < .001$), and the full regression model explained 63.3% of the variance in talent retention ($R^2 = .633$; $F = 91.296$, $p < .001$). Intellectual stimulation ($\beta = .204$, $p < .001$) and individualized consideration ($\beta = .144$, $p = .017$) were significant positive unique predictors. Employee engagement significantly mediated the leadership-retention relationship: the bootstrapped indirect effect was .581, 95% CI (.452, .715), and approximately 77% of the total effect operated through engagement. In contrast, the interaction between leadership and engagement was not significant ($b = .0368$, $p = .466$), indicating no moderation. The findings suggest that IT organizations should develop leaders who stimulate employee thinking, provide individualized developmental support and deliberately cultivate engagement. Importantly, the article treats intention to stay as one component of the broader talent-retention construct rather than incorrectly equating the two.

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INTRODUCTION

The retention of skilled employees has become an important strategic issue for organizations operating in knowledge-intensive sectors. Employee turnover creates costs that extend beyond recruitment and replacement: organizations may lose accumulated technical knowledge, project-specific expertise, customer relationships, team cohesion and institutional memory. These consequences are especially consequential in IT, where organizational performance depends heavily on human expertise, creativity, continuous learning and problem solving. The thesis underlying this article identifies talent retention as a central organizational challenge and positions leadership and employee engagement as theoretically meaningful organizational factors (1–5). Transformational leadership provides a useful lens for understanding why employees may develop stronger attachment to their organizations. Burns conceptualized transformational leadership as a process in which leaders and followers elevate

one another's motivation and purpose, while Bass subsequently developed the framework into an empirically measurable model (6,7). The four commonly recognized dimensions are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (7–10). Rather than relying primarily on exchanges of rewards for performance, transformational leadership seeks to influence employees through vision, role modelling, intellectual challenge and individualized development. This perspective is particularly relevant to IT organizations. Technology-intensive work requires employees to adapt to rapidly changing technologies, solve non-routine problems and acquire new skills. Leaders who encourage innovation and provide development opportunities may therefore create conditions in which employees experience greater meaning and psychological attachment to their work and organization. Previous empirical research has linked transformational leadership with employee engagement, organizational commitment, job performance and retention-related outcomes

(11–16). The present study is situated in Coimbatore, an emerging IT centre in Tamil Nadu. The original thesis collected data from 379 IT employees and examined transformational leadership, employee engagement and talent retention. Talent retention was operationalized as a composite construct comprising intention to stay, organizational commitment and perceived retention risk. This distinction is crucial: the reported correlation $r = .606$ is between transformational leadership and the broader talent-retention construct, not between transformational leadership and intention to stay alone (17). The article therefore adopts a focused and statistically defensible objective: to examine how transformational leadership relates to talent retention among IT employees in Coimbatore and to determine whether employee engagement explains part of this relationship. This reframing removes unnecessary material from the full thesis while retaining the strongest empirical contribution. It also avoids making a direct intention-to-stay claim that is not supported by a separate respondent-level correlation in the supplied thesis.

Research Objective

To examine the relationship between transformational leadership and talent retention among IT employees in Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu, and to assess the mediating and moderating roles of employee engagement.

Hypotheses

H1: Transformational leadership is significantly and positively related to talent retention among IT employees.

H2: Employee engagement is significantly and positively related to talent retention.

H3: Employee engagement significantly moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and talent retention.

H4: Employee engagement significantly mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and talent retention.

Four TL dimensions: Idealized Influence • Inspirational Motivation • Intellectual Stimulation • Individualized Consideration

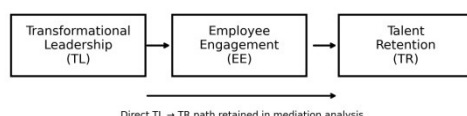


Figure 1. Focused conceptual framework derived from the thesis model

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Transformational Leadership: Transformational leadership is grounded in the idea that leaders can elevate followers' motivation and commitment beyond immediate self-interest (6,7). Bass's model identifies four interrelated behaviours. Idealized influence represents credible role modelling and trust; inspirational motivation involves communicating an attractive vision; intellectual stimulation encourages critical thinking and innovation; and individualized consideration emphasizes coaching, mentoring and attention to individual needs (7–10). Empirical literature generally supports the relevance of transformational leadership to employee

outcomes. Meta-analytic and review evidence has linked transformational leadership with effectiveness and satisfaction (11,12). Contemporary studies further show that transformational leadership can influence employee engagement, trust, commitment, creativity and turnover-related attitudes (13–18). The relevance of leadership is particularly strong in knowledge-intensive environments where employees have substantial external mobility and where managerial relationships influence perceptions of career prospects and organizational support.

Employee Engagement as a Mechanism: Employee engagement refers to a positive, fulfilling work-related psychological state commonly represented by vigor, dedication and absorption (19). The job demands–resources perspective treats engagement as a motivational pathway through which job and organizational resources influence positive employee outcomes (20,21). Transformational leaders can provide several such resources, including meaningful vision, autonomy-supportive interaction, recognition, developmental opportunities and intellectual challenge. Evidence increasingly suggests that engagement may function as a mediator rather than merely as a contextual amplifier. Diko and Saxena (22) found that employee engagement partially mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention. Jiatong et al. (23) reported similar mediation patterns for affective organizational commitment and job performance. Nawaz et al. (24) found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement among IT employees in southern India, with empowerment operating as a mediator.

Transformational Leadership and Retention: Retention can be conceptualized through employees' intention to remain, organizational commitment and perceived risk of leaving. In the present thesis, these three components form the Talent Retention construct. This multidimensional approach is more informative than relying on a single turnover statistic because retention-related attitudes often precede actual turnover behaviour. Prior research has reported that transformational leadership reduces turnover intention and strengthens retention-related outcomes through mechanisms such as engagement, person–organization fit and organizational commitment (22,25,26). However, findings are context dependent. Xuecheng et al. (27), for example, found that training and development, work environment and job satisfaction predicted retention while transformational leadership did not significantly moderate these relationships. Thus, leadership should be regarded as an important organizational mechanism rather than a substitute for sound HR practices.

Indian IT Context and Research Gap: Indian IT organizations operate in a labour market characterized by strong demand for specialized technical capabilities, rapid skill obsolescence and high employee mobility. Recent Indian evidence indicates positive associations between transformational leadership and work engagement among IT employees (24), while research in India's IT services sector has also linked organizational culture traits associated with transformational leadership with intention to stay (28). Nevertheless, the evidence base remains less developed than that available in healthcare, education, hospitality and public-sector settings. Four gaps motivate the present article. First, much of the literature examines turnover intention rather than

the broader positive retention construct. Second, transformational leadership is frequently treated as a single composite variable even though its dimensions may have different practical implications. Third, Indian IT evidence remains comparatively limited. Fourth, employee engagement has commonly been tested as a mediator, but the possibility that it acts as a moderator has received less attention. The thesis directly addresses the last issue by testing both moderation and mediation, allowing the data to determine which role is more appropriate. The study's theoretical foundation is consistent with Social Exchange Theory: supportive and developmental leadership may create favourable social exchanges that employees reciprocate through positive attitudes and stronger organizational attachment (29,30). The findings can also be interpreted using the Job Demands–Resources framework, in which leadership resources can stimulate engagement and thereby contribute to positive employee outcomes (20,21).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Context: A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was adopted. The study was conducted among employees of IT organizations in Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu. The research context is appropriate because IT organizations depend on employees' technical knowledge, project experience and continuous skill development. Data collection began in September 2024 after pilot testing and refinement of the questionnaire.

Population and Sampling: The population was estimated at approximately 30,000 IT employees. The Krejcie and Morgan (31) sample-size approach indicated a minimum sample of 379 respondents. Stratified random sampling was used across three job-level categories to provide representation across organizational positions. A total of 379 valid responses were retained for analysis.

Table 1. Selected demographic profile of respondents

Characteristic	Category / Result	n	%
Gender	Male	206	54.4
	Female	166	43.8
	Prefer not to disclose	7	1.8
Total		379	100.0

The sample also included variation in age, education, job level, work experience, organizational tenure and employment status. The thesis reports that these characteristics were deliberately represented across multiple categories, enabling comparisons of the principal constructs.

Measures: Transformational leadership was measured using items reflecting the four dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, consistent with the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire tradition (8–10).

Employee engagement was represented by vigor, dedication and absorption, consistent with established engagement conceptualization (19). Talent retention was measured through three dimensions: intention to stay, organizational commitment and perceived retention risk, with four items per dimension.

Reliability and Validity: A pilot study was conducted to assess clarity and internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha was used as the reliability criterion (32). Content and face validity were reviewed by academic supervisors and HR practitioners. The measurement model was subsequently assessed through confirmatory procedures. The thesis reports acceptable standardized loadings and satisfactory composite reliability and convergent validity. Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell–Larcker approach (33).

Data Analysis: Frequencies and percentages were used for respondent characteristics. Means and standard deviations described the principal constructs. Pearson correlation examined associations among transformational leadership, employee engagement and talent retention. Multiple regression estimated the unique contribution of the four transformational-leadership dimensions and three engagement dimensions to talent retention. Structural equation modelling was used to examine the leadership–engagement–retention pathway. Hayes PROCESS Model 1 tested moderation and Model 4 tested mediation with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% level unless otherwise stated.

Ethical and Methodological Considerations: Participation was voluntary and responses were treated confidentially. The study is based on self-reported cross-sectional data; consequently, findings should be interpreted as statistical associations rather than definitive causal effects. The geographically restricted sample also limits generalization beyond the Coimbatore IT context.

RESULTS

Descriptive Results: Transformational leadership had a mean of 3.5008 (SD = 0.54965), indicating moderately favourable perceptions. Overall talent retention was 3.5482 (SD = 0.68869). Within the retention construct, perceived retention risk had the highest dimension mean (M = 3.59, SD = 0.72), followed by intention to stay (M = 3.54, SD = 0.77) and organizational commitment (M = 3.51, SD = 0.82). The intention-to-stay score is therefore best interpreted as one component of a broader favourable retention profile, not as a standalone dependent variable in the reported correlation analysis.

Correlation Analysis: Transformational leadership was strongly and positively associated with employee engagement ($r = .730$, $p < .001$) and significantly associated with talent retention ($r = .606$, $p < .001$). Employee engagement also showed a strong positive association with talent retention ($r = .739$, $p < .001$). The ordering of the correlations is theoretically informative: the leadership–engagement and engagement–retention associations were stronger than the overall leadership–retention correlation, which is compatible with a mediating pathway.

Multiple Regression: The regression model was statistically significant, $F(7,371) = 91.296$, $p < .001$, and explained 63.3% of the variance in talent retention. Intellectual stimulation was the strongest transformational-leadership predictor ($\beta = .204$, $p < .001$), followed by individualized consideration ($\beta = .144$, $p = .017$). Idealized influence did not make a significant unique contribution ($\beta = .052$, $p = .212$).

Table 2. Operationalization of the principal constructs

Construct	Dimensions	Items	Scale
Transformational Leadership	Idealized Influence; Inspirational Motivation; Intellectual Stimulation; Individualized Consideration	Multi-item	5-point Likert
Employee Engagement	Vigor; Dedication; Absorption	Multi-item	5-point Likert
Talent Retention	Intention to Stay; Organizational Commitment; Perceived Retention Risk	12	5-point Likert

Table 3. Measurement-model fit indicators

Fit / validity indicator	Reported value	Interpretation
χ^2	334.814	Reported measurement-model statistic
RMSEA	.030	Very good approximate fit
NFI	.977	Good fit
CFI	.986	Good fit
IFI	.987	Good fit
TLI	.925	Acceptable fit

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the principal constructs

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Transformational Leadership	3.5008	0.54965	Moderately favourable
Employee Engagement	3.51	0.586	Favourable
Intention to Stay	3.54	0.77	High
Organizational Commitment	3.51	0.82	High
Perceived Retention Risk	3.59	0.72	High
Overall Talent Retention	3.5482	0.68869	High

Table 5. Pearson correlation matrix

Variable	TL	EE	TR
Transformational Leadership	1.000	.730**	.606**
Employee Engagement	.730**	1.000	.739**
Talent Retention	.606**	.739**	1.000

Note. **p < .01; N = 379.

Pearson Correlations among Principal Constructs (N = 379)

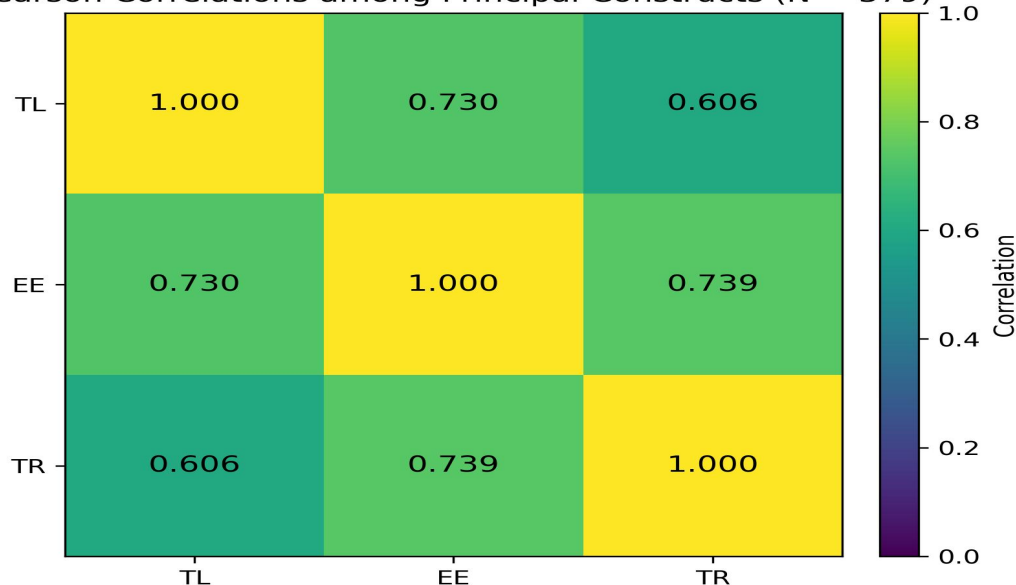


Figure 2. Correlation matrix of transformational leadership, employee engagement and talent retention

Table 6. Multiple regression predicting talent retention (N = 379). R = .795; R² = .633; F(7,371) = 91.296, p < .001

Predictor	β	t	p	Decision
Idealized Influence	.052	1.251	.212	Not significant
Inspirational Motivation	-.090	-2.030	.043	Significant
Intellectual Stimulation	.204	3.596	<.001	Significant
Individualized Consideration	.144	2.400	.017	Significant
Vigor	.056	1.053	.293	Not significant
Dedication	.134	2.770	.006	Significant
Absorption	.440	11.383	<.001	Significant

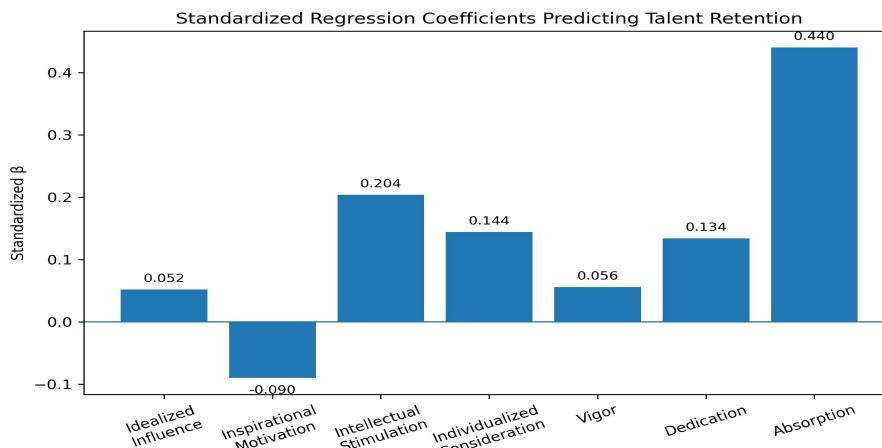


Figure 3. Standardized regression coefficients in the full talent-retention model

Table 7. Structural paths reported in the thesis SEM

Structural path	Standardized estimate	SE	CR	p
TL → Employee Engagement	.730	.038	20.737	<.001
Employee Engagement → Talent Retention	.740	.041	21.358	<.001
TL → Talent Retention (indirect)	.539	—	—	<.001

Partial mediation: approximately 77% of the total effect operates through engagement

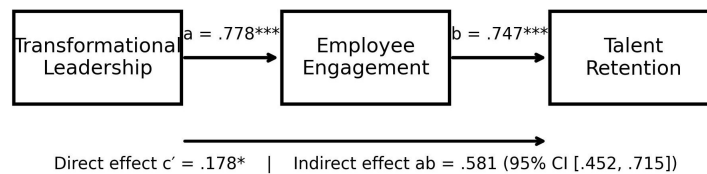


Figure 4. Mediation model and bootstrapped effects

Table 8. PROCESS moderation and mediation results

Analysis	Estimate	p	Conclusion
Moderation: TL × EE	$b = .0368$; $\Delta R^2 = .0006$	.466	No moderation
TL → EE (a path)	$b = .7781$	<.001	Significant
EE → TR controlling TL (b path)	$b = .7472$	<.001	Significant
Total effect TL → TR	$b = .7591$	<.001	Significant
Direct effect TL → TR (c')	$b = .1777$	.005	Significant
Indirect effect TL → EE → TR	.5814; 95% CI [.4523, .7148]	—	Significant; partial mediation

Table 9. Comparison with selected prior evidence

Study	Context / mechanism	Main finding	Relation to present study
Diko & Saxena (2023) [22]	Academic staff; engagement	Engagement partially mediated TL–turnover intention	Supports mediation mechanism
Xiong et al. (2023) [25]	Knowledge workers; P–O fit	TL negatively predicted turnover intention	Supports retention relevance
Donkor et al. (2022) [26]	State-owned enterprises; commitment	Commitment mediated TL–turnover intention	Supports psychological pathway
Nawaz et al. (2024) [24]	Southern Indian IT employees	TL positively related to engagement	Strong contextual alignment
Ali et al. (2024) [16]	Pharmaceutical employees	Engagement mediated leadership–retention relationship	Supports mechanism
Present study	Coimbatore IT employees	EE partially mediates TL–TR; no moderation	Extends evidence to Indian IT

Inspirational motivation showed a statistically significant negative standardized coefficient ($\beta = -.090$, $p = .043$), despite its positive zero-order relationship with retention. This apparent reversal should not be interpreted as evidence that inspirational motivation reduces retention; it is plausibly a suppression effect arising from the high intercorrelations among leadership dimensions and other predictors.

Structural Equation Modelling: The SEM results show a strong standardized path from transformational leadership to employee engagement ($\beta = .730$, $p < .001$) and from employee engagement to talent retention ($\beta = .740$, $p < .001$). The standardized indirect effect of transformational leadership on talent retention through engagement was .539.

Model-fit indices were favourable: GFI = .986, AGFI = .918, CFI = .988, RMR = .010 and RMSEA = .060. The significant chi-square should be interpreted cautiously because chi-square is sensitive to sample size (34).

The moderation model was significant overall ($R^2 = .5569$), but the interaction term was not significant ($b = .0368$, $t = .73$, $p = .466$). The change in explained variance attributable to the interaction was negligible ($\Delta R^2 = .0006$). Thus, employee engagement does not significantly change the strength of the transformational-leadership–talent-retention relationship. The mediation model produced a different conclusion. Transformational leadership significantly predicted engagement ($b = .7781$, $p < .001$), engagement significantly predicted retention while controlling leadership ($b = .7472$, $p < .001$), and the total effect of leadership on retention was significant ($b = .7591$, $p < .001$). The direct effect remained significant after engagement was introduced ($c' = .1777$, $p = .005$). The bootstrapped indirect effect was .5814 with a 95% confidence interval of (.4523, .7148), which excludes zero. Approximately 77% of the total effect was mediated through engagement. The evidence therefore supports partial mediation rather than moderation.

DISCUSSION

The first important finding is that transformational leadership is meaningfully associated with talent retention in the Coimbatore IT context. The correlation of .606 represents a substantial positive association and is consistent with the broader literature linking transformational leadership to turnover-related and retention outcomes (11,22,25,26). The result suggests that employees who perceive stronger transformational behaviours also tend to report stronger retention-related attitudes. The second important finding concerns the relative contribution of the four leadership dimensions. Intellectual stimulation was the strongest unique transformational-leadership predictor in the full regression model, followed by individualized consideration. This pattern is plausible in IT environments because employees depend on opportunities to solve challenging problems, learn new technologies and develop career-relevant capabilities. A leader who challenges employees intellectually while simultaneously providing individualized support may create both competence development and psychological attachment. Idealized influence was not significant after the other predictors were controlled. This does not imply that credibility, trust or role modelling are unimportant. Instead, it indicates that their unique statistical contribution may be absorbed by the other correlated leadership behaviours. The unusually high correlation between intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration ($r = .781$) in the thesis also warrants caution when interpreting dimension-level coefficients. The dimensions may not be sharply differentiated by respondents in this organizational context. The negative coefficient for inspirational motivation requires particular caution. Its zero-order relationship with talent retention was positive, yet its standardized regression coefficient became negative when the highly correlated predictors were entered simultaneously. Such a reversal is consistent with a suppression or multicollinearity effect and should not be interpreted substantively as evidence that inspirational motivation harms retention. The strongest theoretical contribution is the distinction between moderation and mediation. The moderation analysis found no significant interaction between transformational leadership and employee

engagement. In contrast, mediation analysis showed a significant indirect pathway, with approximately 77% of the total effect transmitted through engagement. Thus, engagement appears to function as a mechanism through which transformational leadership contributes to retention rather than as a boundary condition that determines when leadership is more or less effective. His result is consistent with Social Exchange Theory. Employees who receive supportive, developmental and meaningful leadership may reciprocate with stronger psychological involvement in their work and organization (29,30). It is also compatible with the Job Demands–Resources framework, in which leadership and organizational resources can foster engagement, which then contributes to positive outcomes (20,21). The finding extends prior mediation evidence reported by Diko and Saxena (22) and Jiatong et al. (23) into an Indian IT context.

Interpretation of Intention to Stay: Intention to stay was high ($M = 3.54$, $SD = .77$) and formed one of the three dimensions of talent retention. However, the study did not report a separate Pearson correlation between transformational leadership and intention to stay alone. Accordingly, the present article does not claim that $r = .606$ is a direct TL–intention-to-stay coefficient. This distinction materially strengthens the manuscript's methodological defensibility and prevents a reviewer from identifying a construct-definition mismatch.

Practical Implications: First, leadership development in IT organizations should move beyond generic communication training and explicitly develop intellectual stimulation. Managers should provide stretch assignments, encourage alternative solutions, sponsor innovation projects and treat mistakes in experimentation as learning opportunities. Second, individualized consideration should be translated into observable managerial practices: regular development conversations, mentoring, individualized learning plans, recognition of skills and transparent career discussions. Because individualized consideration was a significant predictor, it should be treated as a retention-relevant managerial capability rather than an optional interpersonal skill. Third, engagement should be embedded into leadership accountability. The mediation finding indicates that simply training managers in transformational behaviours is insufficient if those behaviours do not produce an engaged workforce. Organizations should therefore monitor vigor, dedication and absorption through periodic pulse surveys and use the results in leadership-development reviews. Fourth, retention initiatives should not be restricted to permanent employees. The thesis found no significant overall retention difference by nature of employment, and the sample contained both permanent and contract employees. Leadership and engagement practices should therefore be applied consistently across employment categories. Fifth, organizations should avoid assuming that demographic characteristics are the primary explanation for retention differences. The thesis reports generally non-significant relationships between intention to stay and age, education, job level, work experience, tenure and gender. This points toward organization-specific leadership and engagement practices as potentially more actionable levers within the sampled workforce.

Limitations and Future Research: The study has several limitations. First, its cross-sectional design prevents strong temporal causal inference. The mediation findings are

statistically consistent with a mechanism, but longitudinal data would provide stronger evidence that leadership precedes engagement and engagement precedes retention. Second, all principal variables were self-reported in the same survey, creating the possibility of common-method bias (35). Future research should combine employee reports with supervisor ratings and objective HR turnover data.

Third, the study is geographically limited to Coimbatore District. Replication across Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune and other Indian IT centres would test generalizability. Fourth, the strong correlation between intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration suggests a need for further psychometric investigation. Future studies could test higher-order, bifactor or alternative measurement models. Finally, because intention to stay is only one component of talent retention in the present dataset, future research using the raw respondent-level data should directly test the TL–intention-to-stay relationship when that specific research question is the primary objective.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that transformational leadership is an important correlate of talent retention among IT employees in Coimbatore. The evidence is based on 379 valid responses and shows a strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and the broader talent-retention construct ($r = .606$, $p < .001$). The full regression model explained 63.3% of the variance in talent retention, with intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration emerging as significant transformational-leadership predictors. The central finding, however, concerns the role of employee engagement. Engagement did not significantly moderate the leadership–retention relationship, but it significantly mediated that relationship, with approximately 77% of the total effect operating through engagement. The practical implication is straightforward: organizations should not merely ask whether their leaders are transformational; they should ask whether transformational behaviours are creating a workforce that is energized, dedicated and absorbed in its work. The article deliberately distinguishes talent retention from intention to stay. Intention to stay was favourable in the sample, but it is one dimension of the broader retention construct. Maintaining this distinction preserves construct validity and prevents overstatement of the empirical evidence. Overall, the findings support a focused model in which transformational leadership contributes to retention substantially through employee engagement, while also retaining a smaller direct component.

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