

Leadership Characteristics Influence Employees Satisfaction and Turnover Intention of Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC): Case of Shanxi Province, China

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how leadership characteristics influence employee turnover intention in the context of a state-owned financial institution in China, with a particular focus on the mediating role of job satisfaction. Drawing on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the research develops a structural model linking transformational, transactional, and paternalistic leadership styles to employee satisfaction and turnover intention. Data were collected from 452 employees at the Shanxi Branch of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) through a structured questionnaire. The findings reveal that transformational and transactional leadership significantly reduce turnover intention through enhanced satisfaction. Among paternalistic leadership dimensions, benevolent and moral leadership positively affect satisfaction, while authoritarian leadership increases turnover risk and decreases satisfaction. Mediation analysis confirms the central role of satisfaction in the leadership–turnover linkage, though the indirect effect of paternalistic leadership was not significant. This study contributes to leadership theory by integrating COR theory into the analysis of turnover behavior and offers practical insights for improving retention in high-pressure organizational settings.

KEY WORDS: Leadership Characteristics; Job Satisfaction; Turnover Intention; Conservation of Resources Theory; ICBC; Structural Equation Modeling; Paternalistic Leadership.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of rapid globalization and technological advancement, organizations are facing mounting challenges related to workforce stability. One pressing issue in this context is employee turnover, which imposes significant financial and operational burdens, particularly in high-pressure service sectors such as banking [1, 2]. In China, state-owned banks have witnessed a notable decline in staffing levels, with the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) reducing its workforce for ten consecutive

years [3, 4]. The Shanxi Branch, as a regional exemplar, has experienced intensified turnover amid rising performance expectations and growing employee burnout.

Leadership characteristics have emerged as a crucial determinant of employee attitudes and behaviors, including job satisfaction and turnover intention [5]. Grounded in the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study explores how different leadership styles—transformational, transactional, and paternalistic—impact employee satisfaction and, in turn, influence turnover intention. COR theory posits that employees strive to acquire and preserve resources (e.g., emotional support, autonomy, recognition), and leadership behaviors that facilitate such resource gain can enhance satisfaction and reduce the likelihood of turnover [6].

While previous research has established the importance of leadership, few studies have systematically examined the

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mediating role of job satisfaction in the Chinese banking context. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates: (1) the direct effects of various leadership styles on turnover intention, (2) the extent to which these styles influence job satisfaction, and (3) the mediating function of satisfaction in shaping employee retention outcomes.

By focusing on ICBC's Shanxi Branch, this study not only contributes to theoretical development in leadership and organizational behavior but also offers practical insights for talent retention and sustainable human resource strategies in state-owned financial institutions.

Literature Review

Leadership Characteristics and Employee Outcomes: Leadership behavior plays a pivotal role in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors, particularly job satisfaction and turnover intention [7]. Among the various leadership typologies, transformational leadership—characterized by inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—has consistently been linked with higher employee satisfaction and lower turnover intentions [8, 9]. Transformational leaders tend to enhance employees' intrinsic motivation and commitment, thereby reducing their desire to exit the organization [10].

In contrast, transactional leadership emphasizes structured reward systems and performance-based control. While it may not foster deep emotional attachment, transactional leadership can still enhance satisfaction by offering role clarity and immediate feedback [11]. Studies suggest that such mechanisms are particularly effective in high-pressure environments like banking, where clear performance expectations reduce ambiguity and stress [12].

Paternalistic leadership, widely observed in East Asian contexts, integrates authoritarianism, benevolence, and moral integrity. Benevolent and moral dimensions have shown strong positive correlations with employee satisfaction and retention [13, 14], while authoritarian leadership often diminishes satisfaction and increases turnover intention [15, 16]. The divergent effects of paternalistic dimensions underscore the cultural specificity of leadership impacts in hierarchical, collectivist organizations.

Job Satisfaction as a Mediating Mechanism: Job satisfaction serves as a critical psychological state reflecting employees' evaluation of their work experience [17, 18]. As posited by the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, satisfaction arises when employees perceive resource gain—be it through supportive leadership, recognition, or autonomy [19]. High satisfaction, in turn, acts as a buffer against resource depletion and emotional exhaustion, thereby reducing turnover intention [20, 21].

Empirical research consistently confirms the mediating role of satisfaction between leadership and turnover [22]. For instance, studies in banking and education sectors show that leadership indirectly influences retention through its effect on satisfaction [23, 24]. Thus, understanding how different leadership styles shape satisfaction is essential for crafting

targeted retention strategies.

Turnover Intention and Its Antecedents: Turnover intention is a strong predictor of actual employee exit behavior. Prior literature identifies leadership, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment as its most salient antecedents [25, 26]. Specifically, when employees perceive leadership as resource-draining—through micromanagement, unfair treatment, or lack of support—they experience declining satisfaction and greater intent to leave [27, 28].

In high-stress industries such as banking, where performance demands and emotional labor are high, the interplay between leadership and satisfaction becomes especially crucial in mitigating turnover [12, 29]. This highlights the need for context-specific investigations into leadership mechanisms and employee outcomes.

Thus, it leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: The stronger the transformational leader, the lower the propensity of employees to leave.

H2: There is a significant positive correlation between transformational leadership and employee job satisfaction.

H3: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention.

H4: Transactional leadership style is negatively correlated with employee turnover intention.

H5: Transactional leadership has a positive effect on job satisfaction.

H6: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between transactional leadership and turnover intention.

H7: Authoritarian leadership within paternalistic leadership is positively correlated with turnover intention.

H8: Benevolent leadership within paternalistic leadership is negatively correlated with turnover intention.

H9: Moral leadership within paternalistic leadership is negatively correlated with turnover intention.

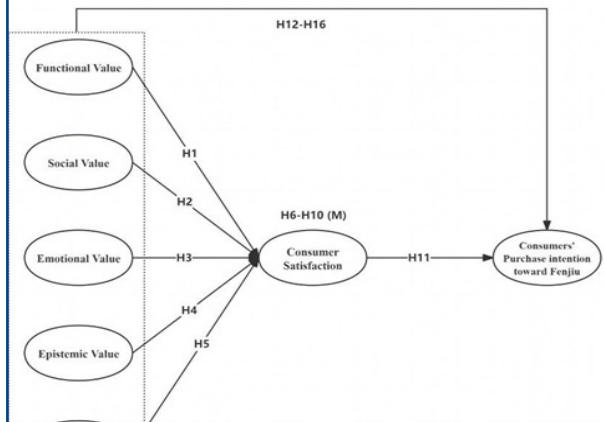
H10: Benevolent leadership within paternalistic leadership has a positive effect on job satisfaction.

H11: Moral leadership within paternalistic leadership has a positive effect on job satisfaction.

H12: Authoritarian leadership within paternalistic leadership has a negative effect on job satisfaction.

H13: Job satisfaction mediates the effects of paternalistic leadership on turnover intention.

H14: Satisfaction shows a negative correlation with turnover intention.

Figure 1 Theoretical model of study

Research Method: This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the influence of leadership characteristics on employee satisfaction and turnover intention. The theoretical framework is grounded in the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which emphasizes the role of resource acquisition and preservation in shaping individual attitudes and behaviors. The research was conducted among employees of the Shanxi Branch of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), which represents a typical case of a large state-owned financial institution facing workforce stability challenges. The target population included a wide range of staff members, such as frontline tellers, relationship managers, and middle-level supervisors. A structured questionnaire was distributed online using internal communication platforms, and a simple random sampling method was adopted to enhance representativeness and reduce sampling bias.

A total of 460 questionnaires were distributed, and 452 valid responses were retained for analysis, yielding a response rate of 98.3%. The sample size exceeded the minimum threshold recommended for robust empirical studies, especially those involving multivariate model testing. The inclusion of a pre-test with 42 respondents ensured the clarity and cultural appropriateness of the survey items before full-scale deployment. All variables were measured using established and validated scales, adapted to the Chinese context. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.”

Strict confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the data collection process. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the academic purpose of the study. This ethical approach ensured honest responses and minimized social desirability bias, particularly in the context of sensitive questions regarding leadership perceptions and turnover considerations.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 452 valid

respondents from the Shanxi Branch of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC). The gender distribution is relatively balanced, with 49.1% male and 50.9% female participants. In terms of marital status, a majority of the respondents were married (64.8%), while 35.2% were unmarried. The age composition reveals a predominantly young workforce: 30.5% of employees were aged 22–25 years, followed by 29.4% in the 26–35 age group, and 27.4% aged 36–45. Only 12.6% were aged above 45.

With regard to educational attainment, 50.0% of the participants held a college diploma, 40.0% had obtained a bachelor’s degree, and 10.0% possessed a master’s degree or higher, indicating a generally well-educated sample. Regarding tenure, the majority had been employed at the bank for 3–5 years (33.2%), followed by 1–3 years (26.3%) and over 5 years (26.5%), while 13.9% had less than one year of service.

Job role distribution shows that the largest proportion of respondents worked as general tellers (26.8%), followed by customer service representatives (9.5%), risk control managers (7.5%), and wealth management managers (6.9%). Finally, monthly income levels were concentrated between 3,000 and 10,000 yuan, with 42.5% earning between 3,000–6,000 yuan and 39.4% between 6,000–10,000 yuan. Only a small fraction of employees (2.0%) reported monthly earnings exceeding 20,000 yuan. Overall, the sample demonstrates diverse representation across key demographic categories, enhancing the robustness and generalizability of the findings.

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for all measurement items related to the six core constructs: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership, moral leadership, job satisfaction, and employee turnover intention. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale, and the results include the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis for each item. Across the transformational leadership dimension (TF1–TF12), the mean scores range from 3.56 to 3.65, suggesting a generally favorable perception of transformational behaviors among ICBC employees. The standard deviations (SDs) remain around 1.00, indicating moderate dispersion of responses. Skewness values are consistently negative, reflecting a tendency toward agreement, while kurtosis values hover near zero, suggesting near-normal distributions.

For transactional leadership (TA1–TA6), the mean scores fall between 3.55 and 3.66, similarly indicating moderate to high employee endorsement of this leadership style. In contrast, authoritarian leadership (AU1–AU3) yields significantly lower mean scores (ranging from 2.36 to 2.41), reflecting employees’ general disapproval or lower exposure to this leadership style. Positive skewness values across all three items indicate a greater concentration of lower ratings, while kurtosis values are slightly negative, indicating a relatively flat distribution. Items measuring benevolent leadership (BE1–BE3) show mean scores around 3.57 to 3.59, again suggesting positive employee perceptions. Negative skewness values confirm this tendency, and low

kurtosis values suggest the data distribution is relatively flat but balanced. For transactional leadership (TA1–TA6),

the mean scores fall between 3.55 and 3.66, similarly indicating moderate to high employee endorsement of this leadership style.

Table 1. Essential Information		
	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	222
	Female	230
Marital status	Unmarried	159
	Married	293
Age	22-25 years old and under	138
	26-35 years old	133
	36-45 years old	124
	45 years old and above	57
Educational background	College	226
	Bachelor's degree	181
	Master's degree or above	45
How many years of service have you been with the company?	1 years or less	63
	1-3 years	119
	3-5 years	150
	5 years or more	120
Which of the following categories does your position belong to?	Public Account Department	24
	Retail Relationship Department	20
	Private Banking Advisor	14
	General Teller	121
	Customer Service Representative	43
	Wealth Management Manager	31
	Credit Card Promoter	21
	Credit Approver	31
	Risk Control Manager	34
	HR	25
	Others	88
Which of the following ranges does your monthly income ?	Less than 3,000 yuan	10
	3,000-6,000 yuan	192
	6,000-10,000 yuan	178
	10,000-20,000 yuan	63
	More than 20,000 yuan	9

In contrast, authoritarian leadership (AU1–AU3) yields significantly lower mean scores (ranging from 2.36 to 2.41), reflecting employees' general disapproval or lower exposure to this leadership style. Positive skewness values across all three items indicate a greater concentration of lower ratings, while kurtosis values are slightly negative, indicating a relatively flat distribution. Items measuring benevolent leadership (BE1–BE3) show mean scores around 3.57 to 3.59, again suggesting positive employee perceptions.

Negative skewness values confirm this tendency, and low kurtosis values suggest the data distribution is relatively flat but balanced.

The moral leadership items (MO1–MO3) also received favorable responses, with mean scores around 3.58 to 3.61. Skewness is consistently negative, and kurtosis values remain close to zero, indicating a relatively normal distribution of responses. Regarding job satisfaction

(SA1–SA10), the average item scores range between 3.55 and 3.63, reflecting a moderate to high level of satisfaction among respondents. All items show negative skewness,

supporting the trend of higher agreement levels. Standard deviations remain close to 1.00, with kurtosis values indicating near-normality.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Results					
Study variables	Measurement items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Transformational Leadership	TF1	3.630	0.985	-0.774	-0.102
	TF2	3.620	1.023	-0.787	-0.206
	TF3	3.560	1.000	-0.726	-0.305
	TF4	3.610	1.044	-0.742	-0.265
	TF5	3.620	1.000	-0.753	-0.264
	TF6	3.600	1.014	-0.784	-0.149
	TF7	3.600	1.013	-0.743	-0.218
	TF8	3.650	0.998	-0.803	-0.003
	TF9	3.590	1.018	-0.900	0.076
	TF10	3.620	1.004	-0.826	-0.079
	TF11	3.590	0.971	-0.687	-0.377
	TF12	3.610	1.029	-0.803	-0.055
Transactional Leadership	TA1	3.550	1.061	-0.777	-0.222
	TA2	3.660	1.014	-0.651	-0.365
	TA3	3.590	1.007	-0.747	-0.310
	TA4	3.580	0.977	-0.778	-0.173
	TA5	3.610	1.001	-0.734	-0.303
	TA6	3.620	1.004	-0.740	-0.245
Authoritarian Leadership	AU1	2.400	0.961	0.804	-0.070
	AU2	2.360	1.017	0.725	-0.222
	AU3	2.410	0.948	0.686	-0.406
Benevolent Leadership	BE1	3.590	1.033	-0.862	-0.080
	BE2	3.570	1.015	-0.704	-0.456
	BE3	3.590	1.001	-0.806	-0.161
Moral Leadership	MO1	3.610	1.075	-0.788	-0.244
	MO2	3.580	0.965	-0.723	-0.169
	MO3	3.580	1.003	-0.801	-0.235
Satisfaction	SA1	3.580	0.967	-0.786	-0.159
	SA2	3.570	1.030	-0.716	-0.385
	SA3	3.630	1.026	-0.750	-0.168
	SA4	3.600	0.999	-0.771	-0.072
	SA5	3.600	0.970	-0.788	-0.081
	SA6	3.600	1.014	-0.656	-0.457
	SA7	3.610	1.003	-0.763	-0.236
	SA8	3.550	1.016	-0.833	-0.135
	SA9	3.580	1.021	-0.725	-0.270
	SA10	3.550	0.990	-0.845	-0.196
Employee Turnover Intention	ET1	2.420	0.990	0.719	-0.271
	ET2	2.330	1.008	0.819	-0.100
	ET3	2.390	1.008	0.782	-0.211

Lastly, employee turnover intention (ET1–ET3) exhibits the lowest mean values in the dataset (ranging from 2.33 to 2.42), suggesting that most employees do not strongly

express an intent to leave. The positive skewness values indicate that responses are concentrated at the lower end of the scale, and the near-zero kurtosis values suggest an approximately normal distribution.

Table 3. Reliability Statistics

Study variables	Number of questions	Cronbach's α
Transformational Leadership	12	0.941
Transactional Leadership	6	0.884
Authoritarian Leadership	3	0.798
Benevolent Leadership	3	0.790
Moral Leadership	3	0.786
Satisfaction	10	0.927
Employee Turnover Intention	3	0.794

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.956
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	10150.367
	df	780
	Sig.	.000

Table 3 reports the internal consistency reliability of each study variable using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. All constructs demonstrate acceptable to excellent reliability, with alpha values exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 [30]. Specifically, transformational leadership shows the highest reliability ($\alpha = 0.941$),

indicating excellent internal consistency across its 12 items. Transactional leadership also demonstrates strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.884$), confirming that the items measuring this construct are cohesive and reliable.

The three dimensions of paternalistic leadership—authoritarian ($\alpha = 0.798$), benevolent ($\alpha = 0.790$), and moral ($\alpha = 0.786$)—all meet the minimum reliability standard, supporting their suitability for inclusion in further analysis. Job satisfaction exhibits high reliability ($\alpha = 0.927$) across its 10 items, suggesting consistent measurement of employees' affective evaluations of their work. Finally, employee turnover intention achieves a reliability coefficient of 0.794, indicating that the three-item scale adequately captures respondents' intentions to leave the organization. Overall, the results confirm that all scales used in this study are psychometrically sound and appropriate for subsequent structural equation modeling.

Table 5. Discriminant validity test

Latent variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Transformational Leadership	0.756						
Transactional Leadership	0.502	0.748					
Authoritarian Leadership	-0.477	-0.465	0.755				
Benevolent Leadership	0.533	0.462	-0.445	0.746			
Moral Leadership	0.447	0.457	-0.439	0.48	0.743		
Satisfaction	0.509	0.556	-0.462	0.489	0.485	0.748	
Employee Turnover Intention	-0.542	-0.58	0.483	-0.505	-0.375	-0.606	0.752

Note: The diagonal is the square root of the corresponding dimension AVE
***: $p < 0.001$

The results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity are presented in Table 4 and provide strong evidence for the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The KMO value of 0.956 indicates excellent sampling adequacy, well above the recommended

threshold of 0.80 [31], suggesting that the correlations among variables are sufficiently compact to yield distinct and reliable factors.

Table 6. Structural equation model path test							
Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	β	S.E.	C.R.	P	Results
H1	TF→ET	-0.166	-0.171	0.058	-2.854	0.004	Supported
H2	TF→SA	0.160	0.164	0.054	2.979	0.003	Supported
H4	TA→ET	-0.225	-0.243	0.058	-3.876	***	Supported
H5	TA→SA	0.258	0.278	0.053	4.889	***	Supported
H7	AU→ET	0.122	0.123	0.061	2.005	0.045	Supported
H8	BE→ET	-0.132	-0.139	0.062	-2.113	0.035	Supported
H9	MO→ET	0.068	0.077	0.055	1.235	0.217	Non-supported
H10	BE→SA	0.135	0.142	0.058	2.340	0.019	Supported
H11	MO→SA	0.143	0.164	0.051	2.816	0.005	Supported
H12	AU→SA	-0.118	-0.119	0.056	-2.098	0.036	Supported
H14	SA→ET	-0.296	-0.296	0.063	-4.703	***	Supported

Note: TF: Transformational Leadership; TA: Transactional Leadership; AU: Authoritarian Leadership; BE: Benevolent Leadership; MO: Moral Leadership; SA: Satisfaction; ET: Employee Turnover Intention.
***: $p < 0.001$

Table 7. Mediation effect bootstrap test						
Hypothesis	Mediation path	Effect size	SE	Bias-Corrected	95%CI	Results
H3	TF→SA→ET	-0.047	0.030	-0.120	-0.001	Supported
H6	TA→SA→ET	-0.076	0.035	-0.171	-0.024	Supported
H13	PL→SA→ET	-0.043	0.027	-0.096	0.011	Non-supported

Note: TF: Transformational Leadership; TA: Transactional Leadership; AU: Authoritarian Leadership; BE: Benevolent Leadership; MO: Moral Leadership; SA: Satisfaction; ET: Employee Turnover Intention; PL: Paternalistic Leadership.

Moreover, Bartlett's test of sphericity is highly significant ($\chi^2 = 10150.367$, $df = 780$, $p < .001$), confirming that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and that meaningful patterns of relationships exist among the items. Together, these results justify the application of factor analysis and support the construct validity of the measurement model.

Table 5 reports the results of discriminant validity testing using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The square roots of the AVE values (diagonal elements) for all latent constructs exceed the corresponding inter-construct correlations (off-diagonal elements), indicating satisfactory discriminant validity.

For instance, the AVE square root for transformational leadership (0.756) is greater than its correlations with other constructs, such as transactional leadership (0.502) and employee turnover intention (-0.542). This pattern holds across all variables, confirming that each construct is conceptually and statistically distinct within the measurement model.

Table 6 summarizes the results of the structural path analysis. The findings indicate that transformational leadership significantly reduces employee turnover intention (H1: $\beta = -0.171$, $p = 0.004$) and positively influences job satisfaction (H2: $\beta = 0.164$, $p = 0.003$). Similarly, transactional leadership has a significant negative effect on turnover intention (H4: $\beta = -0.243$, $p < 0.001$) and a positive effect on satisfaction (H5: $\beta = 0.278$, $p < 0.001$), supporting its role in promoting employee retention and well-being.

Regarding paternalistic leadership, authoritarian leadership is positively associated with turnover intention (H7: $\beta = 0.123$, $p = 0.045$) and negatively related to satisfaction (H12: $\beta = -0.119$, $p = 0.036$), suggesting its detrimental effects on employee outcomes. In contrast, benevolent leadership significantly decreases turnover intention (H8: $\beta = -0.139$, $p = 0.035$) and enhances satisfaction (H10: $\beta = 0.142$, $p = 0.019$). Moral leadership, however, has a significant positive effect on satisfaction (H11: $\beta = 0.164$, $p = 0.005$), but its direct effect on turnover intention is non-significant (H9: $p = 0.217$), indicating a more indirect role.

Finally, job satisfaction exerts a strong negative influence on turnover intention (H14: $\beta = -0.296$, $p < 0.001$), confirming its mediating importance in the leadership–turnover linkage. Collectively, these results support most of the hypothesized relationships and highlight the central role of satisfaction in shaping employee retention outcomes.

Table 7 reports the results of the mediation analysis using bootstrapped bias-corrected confidence intervals. The findings reveal that job satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention (H3: effect = -0.047 , 95% CI $[-0.120, -0.001]$), and between transactional leadership and turnover intention (H6: effect = -0.076 , 95% CI $[-0.171, -0.024]$). These results support the proposed indirect pathways, indicating that transformational and transactional leadership reduce employees' turnover intention, at least in part, through enhanced job satisfaction.

In contrast, the mediating effect of job satisfaction in the relationship between paternalistic leadership (composite) and turnover intention is not statistically significant (H13: effect = -0.043 , 95% CI $[-0.096, 0.011]$). This suggests that the influence of paternalistic leadership on turnover intention may not operate through satisfaction alone and may involve alternative psychological or relational mechanisms. Overall, the findings underscore the critical role of satisfaction in the leadership–retention dynamic, particularly within transformational and transactional leadership contexts.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the influence of various leadership characteristics on employee turnover intention, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable, drawing on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. The findings provide robust empirical support for the majority of hypothesized relationships and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms through which leadership styles shape employee attitudes and behavioral intentions in the Chinese state-owned banking context.

Consistent with prior research, transformational leadership demonstrated a significant negative effect on turnover intention and a positive effect on job satisfaction, confirming H1 and H2. This supports the argument that leaders who provide vision, inspiration, and individualized support foster employees' psychological resources, thus enhancing satisfaction and decreasing the likelihood of exit behavior [25, 32]. The mediation analysis further confirmed that job satisfaction serves as a significant intervening variable in this relationship (H3), aligning with COR theory's assertion that satisfaction functions as both a reflection of resource gain and a buffer against further resource loss [19].

Similarly, transactional leadership was found to significantly reduce turnover intention and increase satisfaction (H4, H5), with satisfaction mediating this effect (H6). These findings suggest that even in hierarchical and results-oriented institutions, the clarity and predictability associated with

transactional practices can promote perceived fairness and stability, contributing to higher satisfaction and reduced turnover, particularly when resource security is prioritized [33].

Regarding paternalistic leadership, the three dimensions yielded differentiated outcomes. Authoritarian leadership increased turnover intention and negatively impacted satisfaction (H7, H12), confirming its resource-depleting nature. In contrast, benevolent leadership had a protective effect, significantly lowering turnover intention and enhancing satisfaction (H8, H10), while moral leadership only improved satisfaction (H11) and had no significant direct effect on turnover intention (H9). These findings highlight the duality of paternalistic leadership and reflect prior evidence that authoritarian control diminishes employee autonomy, whereas benevolence and moral guidance foster trust and psychological safety [34, 35].

Interestingly, the composite mediation effect of paternalistic leadership through satisfaction was non-significant (H13), indicating that other mechanisms—such as emotional attachment, trust in leadership, or perceived organizational support—may better explain its influence on turnover intention. This finding aligns with recent calls to investigate alternative mediating constructs within culturally embedded leadership models [36].

Finally, the strong negative relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention (H14) reaffirms the central role of satisfaction as a proximal predictor of employee retention, consistent with both COR theory and previous empirical studies [37, 38]. It underscores that organizations seeking to minimize turnover should prioritize resource-enriching leadership behaviors that elevate employee satisfaction [39].

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of leadership characteristics on employee turnover intention in the context of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) in Shanxi Province, with job satisfaction examined as a mediating variable. Drawing upon Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the study constructed a theoretical framework to explore how different leadership styles—transformational, transactional, and paternalistic—affect employees' psychological evaluations and behavioral intentions.

The findings reveal that both transformational and transactional leadership significantly enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover intention, with satisfaction serving as a key mediating mechanism. Among paternalistic leadership dimensions, benevolent and moral leadership were associated with positive outcomes, while authoritarian leadership increased turnover risk and decreased satisfaction. However, the overall mediating effect of satisfaction in the paternalistic leadership–turnover pathway was not significant, suggesting the presence of alternative explanatory mechanisms such as trust or perceived justice.

The study contributes to the theoretical development of leadership and organizational behavior literature by integrating COR theory into the leadership-satisfaction-retention framework. It also offers practical implications for human resource management, emphasizing the need to cultivate resource-enriching leadership practices and foster a supportive, satisfying work environment to mitigate turnover in high-pressure service sectors.

Despite its contributions, the study is subject to limitations, including the cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data from a single organizational setting. Future research could adopt longitudinal or multi-source approaches and explore other potential mediators or moderators such as organizational commitment, psychological safety, or leadership-member exchange quality. In conclusion, the study underscores the critical role of leadership in shaping employee experiences and retention outcomes and provides empirical evidence to guide leadership development and retention strategies in China's banking industry.

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