

Research on the Moderating Effect of Transformational Leadership on Job Satisfaction and Intention to Quit of University Staff

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ABSTRACT: Based on the social exchange theory and the transformational leadership theory, this study constructed a research model with job satisfaction as the core variable, and deeply explored the mechanism of transformational leadership on the turnover intention of university faculty members, especially its moderating effect. The study found that transformational leadership not only directly negatively affects the turnover intention, but also can indirectly reduce the turnover intention by enhancing job satisfaction. The four dimensions of idealization influence, motivational inspiration, INTELLECTUAL inspiration, and individualized consideration, by strengthening the organizational commitment, work happiness, and intrinsic motivation of faculty members, effectively buffered the risk of turnover caused by job dissatisfaction, thereby significantly MODERATING the "job satisfaction - turnover intention" path. The research provides solid theoretical support and practical references with operational feasibility for universities to systematically implement transformational leadership practices and enhance the stability of the faculty team.

KEYWORDS: Transformational leadership; Job satisfaction; Turnover intention; University faculty; Moderating effect; Social exchange theory

I.INTRODUCTION

The stability of the faculty and staff in colleges and universities is a core element for ensuring the quality of higher education, promoting academic innovation and achieving the sustainable development of colleges and universities. However, at present, university faculty and staff, especially in certain departments of private universities and some public universities, are generally confronted with multiple challenges such as heavy pressure from research assessment, heavy teaching tasks, unclear career development paths, and insufficient competitiveness in salary and welfare. These factors interact with each other, directly leading to a decline in the job satisfaction of some faculty and staff and an increase in their intention to leave, which in turn affects the quality of discipline construction and talent cultivation. Therefore, delving deeply into the key factors influencing the resignation intentions of university faculty and staff and their internal mechanisms of action holds significant theoretical value and practical urgency for stabilizing the high-quality teaching staff and enhancing the core competitiveness of universities.

Among the various organizational and management factors influencing the intention to leave, leadership style plays a crucial role. Traditional transactional leadership emphasizes short-term exchange relationships based on clear rewards and punishments, while transformational leadership is a leadership style that can stimulate high-level intrinsic motivations of subordinates, promoting the growth and development of both the organization and individuals. Burns (1978) was the first to propose this theory, defining it as the process of mutual improvement of moral and motivational levels between leaders and subordinates^[1]. Bass (1985) subsequently deepened this theory and introduced it into the field of organizational psychology, establishing a four-dimensional structure including idealization influence, motivational inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration ^[2](Figure 1). Since its proposal, the transformational leadership theory has been widely verified in enterprises to effectively enhance employees' organizational commitment and job satisfaction, thereby significantly reducing the intention to

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leave. However, as a knowledge-based organization characterized by high intellectualism, professionalism, and high autonomy, the faculty group in universities has unique values, demand structures, and behavioral patterns. The application effect, action path, and boundary conditions of transformational leadership in this specific organizational environment still need to be deeply discussed and empirically tested in combination with the academic ecology and cultural context of universities. This study aims to fill this research gap and systematically examine the regulatory mechanism of transformational leadership in the relationship between faculty job satisfaction and intention to leave in the university environment.

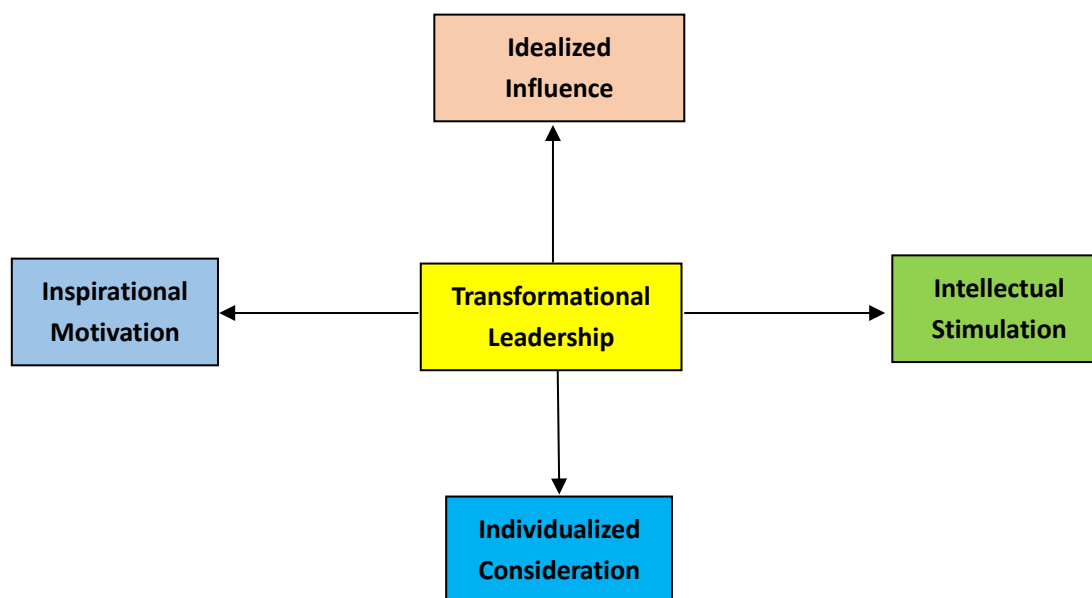


Figure 1: The concept diagram of transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978)

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

A. The Essence and Development of Transformational Leadership Theory

The core of transformational leadership theory lies in that leaders, through their own charisma, vision motivation, intellectual inspiration and personalized care, enable subordinates to transcend personal interests and strive for higher organizational goals and collective visions. As shown in Figure 1, its four dimensions are specifically manifested as follows:

Idealized influence refers to a leader becoming a role model that subordinates admire, respect and trust by demonstrating noble moral qualities, firm values and the spirit of taking risks. In the context of higher education institutions, this means that the heads of departments or the president set a good example, adhere to academic ethics, and be impartial and selfless, thereby earning the heartfelt support of the faculty and staff. Motivational motivation refers to the act of leaders depicting a clear, attractive and meaningful blueprint for the organization's future, using symbolic language and emotional appeal to inspire subordinates' enthusiasm for work, sense of mission and team spirit. For instance, university leaders closely link the personal efforts of faculty and staff with the school's brilliant future by elaborating on the school's long-term development plans and the grand goals of discipline construction. Intellectual motivation refers to leaders encouraging subordinates to bravely question the status quo, challenge traditional assumptions, think about problems from a critical and creative new perspective, and explore new solutions. In an academic environment, this is reflected in encouraging teachers to conduct interdisciplinary research, supporting the innovation of teaching methods, and creating an academic atmosphere that allows for trial and error and tolerates failure. Personalized consideration emphasizes that leaders not only view their subordinates as a whole, but also pay attention to each member's unique needs, potential abilities and career development aspirations, acting as coaches or mentors to provide personalized guidance and support. For university teachers, this means that leaders need to understand their different needs in teaching, research, social services and even personal life, and provide differentiated support and assistance.

The expanded theoretical framework of Bass (1985) clearly states that transformational leaders can enhance their subordinates' self-esteem and self-efficacy through the behaviors in the above four dimensions, prompting them to internalize

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organizational interests as personal goals and thereby achieve performance that exceeds expectations. In colleges and universities, department heads or presidents with transformative leadership skills can convey values, promote the school's development vision, support teachers' teaching, research and innovation, and pay attention to their career growth and personal needs, jointly creating a supportive, innovative and dynamic working atmosphere.

B. The Relationship between Job Satisfaction and Intention to Quit

Job satisfaction refers to the attitude and emotional response that employees have towards their work and the work environment. Hoppock (1935) defined it as the psychological and physiological satisfaction that employees feel regarding the factors of the work environment^[3]. For university faculty members, job satisfaction encompasses multiple dimensions such as teaching autonomy, research support, salary and benefits, colleague relationships, promotion opportunities, and school management policies. A large number of studies have consistently shown that job satisfaction is a key variable in predicting the intention to leave, and there is a significant negative correlation between the two. High satisfaction enhances the intention to stay by increasing the sense of work value; conversely, the accumulation of dissatisfaction can lead to resignation.

C. The moderating effect of transformational leadership: Theoretical mechanism analysis

Transformational leadership plays a crucial moderating role in the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention. According to the social exchange theory, the relationship between leaders and subordinates is a reciprocal exchange process. When subordinates perceive support, trust, and respect from transformational leaders, they will have an obligation to reciprocate. This reciprocity is typically manifested in higher organizational commitment, stronger work engagement, and lower turnover intention. Specifically, the moderating effect of transformational leadership on the "job satisfaction - turnover intention" path is reflected in two aspects:

1) *Enhance protection effect*: When the level of transformational leadership is high, the positive and supportive working environment created by the leader can amplify the inhibitory effect of job satisfaction on the intention to leave. Even if the staff are not highly satisfied in some aspects, strong leadership support, a harmonious team atmosphere, and meaningful work experiences can serve as a compensation, effectively buffering dissatisfaction and thus maintaining a relatively low intention to leave.

2) *Stimulating Intrinsic Motivation*: Transformational leadership, through intellectual stimulation and motivational encouragement, can closely integrate the personal growth of the staff with the organizational goals, making the work itself more challenging and meaningful. The satisfaction of this intrinsic motivation can greatly enhance deep job satisfaction, making the staff less likely to have thoughts of leaving due to fluctuations in external conditions.

III. RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS DERIVATION

Based on the above theoretical analysis, this paper constructs the following research model (Figure 2) : Taking transformational leadership as the moderating variable, it examines its moderating effect on the main path of "job satisfaction → resignation intention". Meanwhile, the model also acknowledges the possible mediating role that job satisfaction may play between transformational leadership and turnover intention, but the focus of this paper's discussion lies in its moderating mechanism.

Theoretical basis: Moderating effect theory. High-transformational leaders give job satisfaction a greater weight and influence in predicting the intention to leave by providing a "protective effect" and "motivational reinforcement". When the level of leadership is low, even if the satisfaction level is high, employees may still leave due to the lack of leadership support and development prospects. When the leadership level is high, the willingness of highly satisfied employees to stay will be greatly strengthened, while the tendency of low-satisfied employees to leave will be effectively buffered.

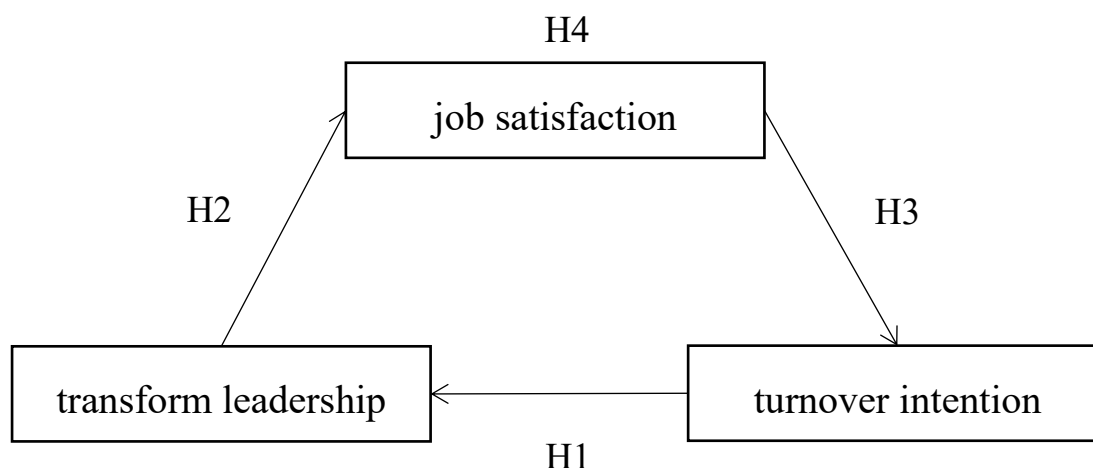


Figure 2 Model for Social Exchange Theory and Research Hypotheses Construction

H1: Transformational leadership has a direct negative impact on the intention to leave of university staff.

H2: Transformational leadership has a direct positive impact on the job satisfaction of university staff.

H3: Job satisfaction has a direct negative impact on the intention to leave of university staff.

H4: Transformational leadership plays a mediating role in the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to leave.

That is, the higher the level of transformational leadership, the stronger the negative impact of job satisfaction on the intention to leave.

IV. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Direct Impact of Transformational Leadership on Intention to Leave (H1)

The investigation of ideological and political course teachers in private colleges and universities in this study shows that transformational leadership has a significant negative impact on the intention to resign. This indicates that if university administrators can effectively implement a transformational leadership style, by demonstrating convincing leadership charisma, sincerely caring for teachers' professional development, and clearly depicting and inspiring the team to pursue a common vision, they can directly and effectively weaken teachers' thoughts of leaving. This profoundly aligns with the fundamental logic of social exchange: leaders' investment and care for faculty and staff in terms of emotion, professionalism and development ultimately lead to the latter's stronger loyalty to the organization and more stable retention behavior. Bass & Riggio (2022) also pointed out in their meta-analysis that transformational leadership can directly reduce employees' sense of alienation and turnover tendency within the organization by building positive leader-member relationships.

B. The driving effect of transformational leadership on job satisfaction (H2)

Transformational leadership can meet the intrinsic and extrinsic needs of staff by creating a supportive and empowering working environment, such as implementing policies that support work-life balance, recognizing employees' achievements, and providing development opportunities. This can significantly enhance their job satisfaction. In the context of universities, this means that a leader who is good at delegating authority, encouraging innovation, and caring about the growth of teachers can significantly increase the overall satisfaction of teachers in teaching, research, and interpersonal relationships.

C. Key Mediating and Transmissive Effects of Job Satisfaction (H3)

The hypothesis of H3 that job satisfaction negatively affects turnover intention is a classic conclusion that has been repeatedly verified in organizational behavior and management. In the empirical data of college teachers in this study, job satisfaction also shows a significant negative predictive effect on turnover intention. This result clearly indicates to university administrators that one of the core approaches to stabilizing the teaching staff is to systematically diagnose and enhance the overall job satisfaction

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of teachers. Whether it is improving hardware facilities, optimizing the salary system, or providing fairer promotion opportunities and more efficient administrative services, the ultimate goal should all point to enhancing teachers' positive experiences and satisfaction in the workplace. Madi Odeh et al. (2023) pointed out that job satisfaction is a key psychological state for alleviating work stress and negative emotions and preventing them from transforming into the intention to resign^[4].

D. Explanation of the Moderating Effect of Transformational Leadership (H4)

The mediating effect of job satisfaction (the indirect effect is -0.262, accounting for 60.79% of the total effect) can be understood as follows: A principal with high transformational leadership not only directly enhances teachers' satisfaction, but also creates an organizational atmosphere. In this atmosphere, teachers' job satisfaction can be more effectively "transformed" into the intention to remain. For instance, even if a teacher has some slight dissatisfaction with the research assessment system, if he/she highly respects and trusts the charismatic and caring college leader, and is greatly inspired by the vision of the discipline's development, then the positive emotional experience and expectations brought about by the outstanding leadership are likely to outweigh the dissatisfaction caused by a single system, thereby regulating (weakening) the strength of the link between "dissatisfaction → intention to leave". Conversely, in an environment with low transformational leadership and rigid management, teachers' job dissatisfaction is more likely and directly to lead to the intention to leave.

V. MANAGEMENT INSIGHTS AND PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Based on the above research conclusions, in order to effectively reduce the turnover rate of university faculty and staff and enhance the stability of the teaching staff, this paper puts forward the following management inspirations and practical suggestions

System promotion and internalization of transformational leadership style: When universities select and appoint middle-level and above managers, they should go beyond the sole consideration of academic achievements and take transformational leadership qualities (such as vision planning ability, emotional resonance and motivation ability, innovative thinking, and humanistic care spirit) as important evaluation indicators. Regularly organize transformational leadership training sessions and workshops for existing managers to help them understand and master specific behavioral patterns such as idealized influence, motivational motivation, intellectual motivation, and personalized consideration. Encourage managers to establish "leadership learning communities" to share successful experiences and challenges.

Focus on key factors and precisely enhance job satisfaction: Management should regularly assess the job satisfaction of faculty and staff through anonymous questionnaires and other methods, identify key dissatisfaction factors (such as the salary system, promotion mechanism, administrative services, research support, etc.), and based on the diagnosis results, formulate and implement targeted improvement measures. For instance, optimize the salary and welfare system to make it more internally fair and externally competitive; Reform the professional title evaluation system to make it more in line with the characteristics of different disciplines and the development laws of teachers. Simplify administrative procedures and enhance service awareness; Increase investment in academic research, improve experimental conditions and library resources. Take the implementation of transformational leadership practices themselves as the core strategy for enhancing satisfaction.

Building a supportive organizational culture: Senior leaders in colleges and universities should take the lead and guide middle-level managers to jointly strive to build an organizational culture characterized by mutual trust, open communication, encouragement of innovation, and teamwork. This positive cultural environment shaped by the concept of transformational leadership can greatly enhance the organizational identity, sense of belonging and psychological security of the teaching and administrative staff. When faculty and staff feel trusted, respected and inclusive, they will demonstrate stronger psychological resilience and adaptability when facing research pressure, teaching challenges or interpersonal conflicts, thereby effectively stabilizing the teaching staff. Leaders should proactively create open communication channels to ensure that teachers' voices are heard and their suggestions are valued.

Pay attention to individual differences and implement personalized support: Recognize the diversity of faculty and staff in terms of career development stages, family situations, personal values, etc. Managers should practice "personalized consideration", proactively understand the specific circumstances and needs of each teacher, and provide differentiated support

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and flexible arrangements within the possible scope (such as flexible working hours, a "mentorship system" for young teachers, and convenience for teachers with family burdens, etc.). This kind of personalized care can greatly enhance teachers' emotional commitment, making them feel the humanized warmth of the organization and thus strengthening their willingness to stay.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study clearly reveals that transformational leadership plays a multi-dimensional and crucial role in the stability of the teaching staff in colleges and universities. It can not only directly and negatively influence the turnover intention of faculty and staff, but also indirectly reduce the risk of turnover by improving job satisfaction. Moreover, through its "protective effect" and "motivational reinforcement" mechanism, it effectively regulates the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention. That is, in an environment with a high level of transformational leadership, the inhibitory effect of job satisfaction on turnover intention is even stronger. Faculty and staff are also better able to withstand the impact of external pressure and factors of dissatisfaction. This series of mechanisms of action is rooted in the reciprocal logic of social exchange and is specifically realized through four dimensions: idealized influence, motivational motivation, intellectual motivation and personalized consideration. Therefore, university administrators must transcend the traditional transactional management mindset and strive to achieve a fundamental transformation towards modern enabling leadership. They should organically integrate the systematic cultivation and practice of transformational leadership styles, the construction of supportive organizational cultures, and the precise improvement of job satisfaction, thereby fundamentally stimulating the sense of belonging, creativity, and willingness to stay among faculty and staff. Build a solid and stable talent foundation for the high-quality and sustainable development of higher education.

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