ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Impact of transformational leadership, happiness management, and work stress on turnover intention

Impacto del liderazgo transformacional, la gestión de la felicidad y el estrés laboral sobre la intención de rotación

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ABSTRACT

In the context of ongoing labour transformation and increasing talent turnover, understanding the factors influencing employee retention has become a strategic priority for modern organisations. This study analyses the effect of transformational leadership on turnover intention, incorporating happiness management and work-related stress as mediating variables. Additionally, it explores potential differences between Mexico's public and private sectors. A quantitative, non-experimental, and cross-sectional design was employed, using a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of 414 employees from various educational, governmental, and corporate institutions. Data were analysed through Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modelling (CB-SEM) and multigroup analysis. The results indicate that transformational leadership positively influences happiness management, reducing stress and turnover intention. Although work-related stress increased turnover intention, its mediating effect was not statistically significant. Sectoral differences were also observed: in the private sector, transformational leadership acted as a buffer against stress, whereas in the public sector, happiness management played a stronger role in reducing turnover. The proposed model contributes to the advancement of Social Exchange Theory by incorporating emotional mechanisms as key explanatory factors for employee retention. The findings offer valuable insights for developing human-centred organisational policies tailored to sector-specific dynamics and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals related to decent work and emotional wellbeing.

Keywords: happiness management; job turnover; public sector; private sector; transformational leadership; work stress.

RESUMEN

En el contexto de la transformación laboral y el incremento en la rotación de talento, comprender los factores que influyen en la retención de empleados se ha convertido en una prioridad estratégica para las organizaciones modernas. Este estudio analiza el efecto del liderazgo transformacional sobre la intención de rotación, incorporando la gestión de la felicidad y el estrés laboral como variables mediadoras. Asimismo, explora posibles diferencias entre los sectores público y privado en México. Se empleó un diseño cuantitativo, no experimental y transversal, mediante un cuestionario estructurado aplicado a una muestra de 414 empleados de diversas instituciones educativas, gubernamentales y corporativas. Los datos se analizaron mediante Modelado de Ecuaciones Estructurales basado en Covarianzas (CB-SEM) y análisis multigrupo. Los resultados indican que el liderazgo transformacional influye positivamente en la gestión de la felicidad, reduciendo el estrés y la intención de rotar. Aunque el estrés laboral incrementó dicha intención, su efecto mediador no fue estadísticamente significativo. También se observaron diferencias sectoriales: en el sector privado, el liderazgo transformacional actuó como amortiguador del estrés, mientras que, en el sector público, la gestión de la felicidad desempeñó un papel más relevante en la reducción de la rotación. Los hallazgos ofrecen información valiosa para el desarrollo de políticas organizacionales centradas en las personas, adaptadas a las dinámicas sectoriales y alineadas con los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible relacionados con el trabajo decente y el bienestar emocional.

Palabras clave: felicidad laboral; liderazgo transformacional; rotación de personal; sector público; sector privado; estrés laboral.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, also known as Industry 4.0, organisations are undergoing profound transformations driven by digitalisation, automation, and emerging technologies that reshape production models, workplace dynamics, and employee expectations (Jiménez-Marín et al., 2021; Ravina-Ripoll et al., 2023). These global changes, marked by economic volatility, technological evolution, and generational shifts, have intensified organisations' concern for emotional wellbeing and talent retention (Bobek et al., 2024). In emerging countries such as Mexico, these challenges acquire specific nuances, where structural tensions and social inequalities magnify the difficulties in creating sustainable and inclusive work environments (Cezarino et al., 2022). Moreover, the contrast between public and private sectors in Mexico introduces additional complexities, as these institutional domains differ in their organisational climate, leadership approaches, and employee expectations.

In this context, it becomes essential to explore the silent yet powerful factors that weaken organisational commitment and influence labour decisions that impact productivity and social cohesion (Waseem, 2025). In alignment with the international agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8, aimed at ensuring healthy working environments and promoting sustained economic growth, interest in studying emotional and psychological dynamics within organisations has intensified (Grum & Babnik, 2022). However, research efforts remain fragmented, especially in attempts to understand the connections between leadership styles, happiness management, and the emotional responses triggered by demanding work contexts (Díaz-García et al., 2024). This fragmentation is even more evident in Latin American countries, where studies remain insufficient to grasp how these elements interact and shape individual decisions to stay in or leave a job (Ravina-Ripoll et al., 2023).

From a psychological perspective, various schools of thought have highlighted the influence of leadership on organisational climate and perceived wellbeing; however, a comprehensive analysis remains absent, one that considers how happiness management and work-related stress may function as explanatory bridges between enacted leadership and mobility behaviours (Salazar-Altamirano et al., 2024). Even more concerning is the lack of empirical studies exploring these links in comparative contexts, examining differences between the public and private sectors, where work dynamics and emotional conditions may differ substantially (Galvan-Vela et al., 2024).

Based on this, the limited existence of research simultaneously addressing transformational leadership, happiness management, and work stress as mediators of turnover intention limits the ability of organisations to design effective retention and wellbeing strategies (Kyambade & Namatovu, 2025). Furthermore, the lack of understanding of how these relationships vary between the public and private sectors represents a significant limitation, considering each domain's cultural, regulatory, and organisational particularities (Cortés-Denia et al., 2023).

In response, the present study seeks to contribute to the advancement of knowledge by proposing an analysis that explores the effect of transformational leadership on turnover intention in the Mexican context, considering the mediating role of happiness management and work-related stress, as well as the direct relationships among these variables. A multigroup analysis is also considered, allowing for the identification of differences between public and private sectors, aiming to contribute with results that support the development of more human, resilient, and wellbeing-oriented organisational policies. With this aim, the article is structured into seven sections: the introduction, which presents the context and relevance of the study; the conceptual framework, which outlines the theoretical basis and background; the methodology, describing the design, sample, and analytical techniques employed; the results and discussion, which present the findings and contrast them with existing literature; the conclusions, derived from the analysis; the practical, theoretical, and social implications of the study; and finally, its limitations and proposals for future research.

Theoretical framework

The variables considered in this research resulted from analysing recent literature and identifying potential theoretical gaps in happiness management models. These elements form a theoretical model that explains the interactions between transformational leadership, happiness management, work stress, and turnover intention. Figure 1 presents the proposed theoretical model, which integrates the direct and indirect links between the variables and the mediating effects to be analysed. This model will serve as the basis for the development of the hypotheses, which are detailed in the following sections.
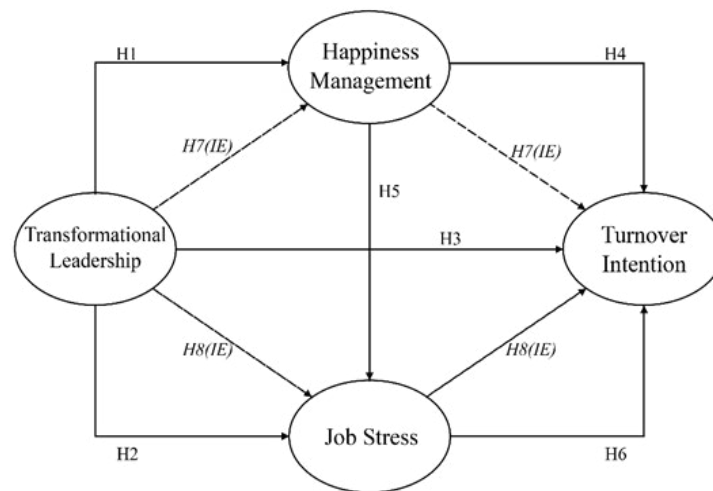
Figure 1. *Proposed model.*

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership has been a subject of interest since the 1970s, when Bass (1985) expanded upon Burns' initial ideas by identifying its capacity to generate profound changes within organisations through charismatic influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Conger, 1999). Since then, research has advanced towards a more complex understanding of how such leaders impact both productivity and employees' emotional wellbeing, positioning transformational leadership as a benchmark in modern human resource management (Ravina-Ripoll & Robina-Ramírez, 2023).

Conceptually, transformational leadership is defined as a process through which leaders positively influence their followers, motivating them to go beyond their interests for the collective good and stimulating personal and organisational development (Álvarez & Vidal, 2020). This form of leadership goes beyond immediate results, shaping organisational cultures that promote innovation, resilience, and emotional wellbeing (Niemiec, 2020). According to Mercader et al. (2021), the current interest in studying this dimension is undeniable, as in a world characterised by rapid change and volatile work environments, organisations require leaders capable of sustaining team morale, motivation, and commitment over the long term.

In this regard, existing literature has demonstrated the relationship between transformational leadership and happiness management. A notable example is the study by Çakır and Özgenel (2024) in Turkey with 403 teachers from public schools in Istanbul, which found that the transformational leadership of headteachers directly and positively influenced happiness management, partially mediated by organisational culture, highlighting its role in formal educational environments. Conversely, Setiawan et al. (2020), in Indonesia, with a sample of 100 employees from food sector startups, found that transformational leadership had no significant direct effect on happiness management without organisational learning capacities and internal facilitators, evidencing contextual limitations.

Regarding the link between transformational leadership and work stress, Adiguna and Suwandana (2023) conducted a study in Indonesia with 287 employees under local government contracts, demonstrating that transformational leadership significantly reduces work-related stress, mitigating its effect on turnover intention. However, Jimoh et al. (2023), in Nigeria, with 183 employees from a state ministry, found that although transformational leadership improves organisational behaviour, its effect on reducing stress was moderate and insignificant, indicating that other contextual variables may exert more significant influence.

These studies suggest that transformational leadership not only has a direct role in influencing wellbeing and stress but may also operate through mediators such as happiness management and stress levels, which in turn shape employees' decision to stay or leave. This interconnectedness underpins the central role of leadership in the proposed model. Based on the arguments previously developed, the following research hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on happiness management.
H2: Transformational leadership has a negative and significant effect on work stress.

Happiness management

Concern about happiness within organisations has a solid foundation in the literature. However, it has gained relevance over the last decade as companies increasingly recognise its impact on productivity, innovation, and employee retention (Salazar-Altamirano et al., 2024). Since its initial theoretical approaches, happiness management has evolved from a philosophical perspective into an organisational strategy that integrates policies, culture, and leadership focused on employees' emotional wellbeing (Firmansyah & Wahdiniwaty, 2023). Conceptually, it is understood as a set of practices that aim at momentary job satisfaction and building a sense of belonging, purpose, and balance between personal and professional life, fostering positive and resilient work environments (Ravina-Ripoll et al., 2021). The relevance of researching this variable lies in its direct influence on performance, creativity, and retention intentions, especially in post-pandemic contexts where mental health has been recognised as a global priority (Hartanto, 2024; Mercader et al., 2025).

Empirical evidence demonstrates strong, although not exempt from contradiction, relationships between happiness management and work stress. In China, Zhu and Chang (2025), with a sample of 756 university lecturers, showed that work stress negatively affects teaching performance. However, this effect is mediated by happiness management, indicating that organisations managing happiness can mitigate the effects of stress. In contrast, Özer et al. (2022), in Turkey, with a sample of 195 healthcare professionals, found that although the perception of happiness is positively related to the work environment, stress continues to have a dominant and difficult-to-counteract impact, demonstrating that in high-pressure contexts, happiness management faces structural limitations.

Given this evidence, it is expected that happiness management will not only act as an outcome of transformational leadership, but also as a mechanism that reduces work stress and turnover intention, playing a dual mediating role within the model.

H5: Happiness management has a positive and significant effect on work stress.

Work stress

Work stress has been a subject of study since the mid-20th century when the adverse effects generated by constant pressure in organisational environments on employees' physical and mental health began to be identified (Pila et al., 2023; Pykett & Paterson, 2022). Over time, the conceptualisation of this variable has evolved to be understood as a psychological and physiological response to imbalances between job demands and the individual's coping capacity, affecting their wellbeing and performance (Gunasekra & Perera, 2023). According to Dima et al. (2021), the academic and practical relevance of researching work stress emerges from the increase in volatile work environments, work overload, and pressure for results, especially in highly demanding sectors such as healthcare, education, and financial services. Moreover, Saparniene et al. (2023) contribute to the discussion by stating that this phenomenon affects productivity and interpersonal relationships and, at the same time, has implications at both organisational and societal levels.

Given its central role, work stress is examined here as both an outcome of leadership and happiness management, and as a potential driver of turnover intention, which reinforces its position as a key node in the theoretical model.

Turnover intention

Concern about labour mobility and the decisions that lead human talent to leave organisations is not new. Since the first studies in the 1970s, turnover intention has been analysed as a predictive indicator of actual turnover related to internal organisational conditions and personal and contextual factors (Chang et al., 2024). This concern has evolved, integrating organisational, psychological, and sociological theories to understand better the dynamics of work commitment and retention (Ravina-Ripoll et al., 2024). In recent times, this line of research has gained relevance in the face of unstable work environments and disruptive changes in global labour markets (Poon et al., 2022).

Conceptually, turnover intention is understood as an employee's deliberate and conscious desire to leave their job within a near time horizon (Tett & Meyer, 1993). This phenomenon has been considered a strong predictor of turnover and is essential in human resource studies due to its impact on organisational continuity (Smokrović et al., 2022). According to Deci et al. (2017), turnover intention arises from accumulated job dissatisfaction, perceived stress, and dysfunctional leadership styles, directly affecting productivity and internal cohesion. The current relevance of researching turnover intention is based on the high competition for talent and the organisational need to reduce costs arising from staff turnover (Alhajaj & Ahmad, 2023). Moreover, turnover intention is regarded as a strategic variable for understanding workplace wellbeing dynamics in academia, especially in emerging contexts where retention challenges are more significant (Hanoum et al., 2024).

Yulianto (2024) showed that strong transformational leadership significantly reduces turnover intention, an effect positively mediated by job satisfaction. Similarly, Kaur & Kaur (2023) found that transformational leadership positively influences happiness management, reducing turnover intention. In contrast, Cahyaningrum & Santosa (2024) argued that high work overload can limit the effect of happiness management on turnover. Finally, Bas (2022) found that work stress increases turnover intention, though Soraya et al. (2023) showed this can be mitigated by positive leadership.

Thus, turnover intention is presented as the outcome of a chain of psychosocial interactions led by transformational leadership, shaped by emotional wellbeing, and burdened by stress.

H3: Transformational leadership has a negative and significant effect on turnover intention.

H4: Happiness management has a negative and significant effect on turnover intention.

H6: Work stress has a positive and significant effect on turnover intention.

Mediation of happiness management and work stress and its contribution to social exchange theory

Research addressing the mediation of happiness management in the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention is still incipient. Romão et al. (2022), in Portugal, with a sample of 271 employees from various organisations, showed that happiness management significantly mediates the relationship between leaders' coaching skills (associated with transformational leadership) and turnover intention. Conversely, no empirical studies have been found that contradict this effect, suggesting a partial consensus, albeit limited by the small number of investigations. As for the mediation of work stress, no empirical studies specifically evaluated its role in transformational leadership and turnover intention, highlighting an important scientific gap.

Likewise, no study has been identified that addresses the complete model of transformational leadership, happiness management, work stress, and turnover intention differentiated by public and private sectors, reinforcing this work's originality. The present research is grounded in Social Exchange Theory, which posits that organisational relationships are based on reciprocity and mutual benefit (Udin, 2023). This study aims to expand that theory by integrating critical emotional variables as explanatory mediators, allowing an understanding of how transformational leaders influence retention decisions through wellbeing management and stress containment. The theoretical contribution lies in enriching social exchange models with psycho-emotional components applied to emerging contexts and sector-differentiated environments, strengthening the design of organisational policies based on sustainable and committed human relationships.

Based on the theoretical evidence gathered, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H7: Happiness management mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention.

H8: Work stress mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention.

H9: There are significant differences in the relationships between transformational leadership, happiness management, work stress, and turnover intention among human talent in the public and private sectors.

METHODOLOGY
Participants and procedure

This study followed a quantitative approach with a non-experimental, cross-sectional design. Data was collected between October and December 2024 using a digital questionnaire distributed through non-probability convenience sampling. To reduce common method bias (CMB), several strategies recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003) were applied, such as ensuring participant anonymity, using neutrally worded items, and presenting the instrument in clearly organised sections. In addition, harman's single-factor test was performed, and the first factor explained only 29.84% of the variance, well below the 50% threshold, confirming that no single factor dominates the measurements.

Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was guaranteed at all stages of the study. The final sample consisted of 409 workers aged between 18 and 70 years (M = 36.9, SD = 9.92). Most participants worked in large companies, with representation across various hierarchical levels and sectors. Regarding institutional distribution, 51.69% belonged to the public sector and 48.31% to the private sector. Participating institutions included organisations from educational, governmental, and service industries, covering both administrative and operational roles. The detailed characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive data.*

Variable	Options	Frequency	Percetange
Sex	Female	256	63.04%
	Male	153	36.96%
Job position	Junior level	159	38.41%
	Middle management	190	47.10%
	Senior management	30	7.25%
	Owner	30	7.25%
Organisation size	Micro	62	14.98%
	Small	53	12.80%
	Medium	76	18.36%
	Large	218	53.86%
Nature of institution	Public	209	51.69%
	Private	200	48.31%
Variable	Limits	Mean	S.D.
Age (years)	18 to 70 years	36.9	9.92

Instruments

The data collection instrument consisted of a digital questionnaire composed of validated scales selected for their suitability in measuring the study variables: Happiness Management, transformational leadership, work stress, and turnover intention. All questions used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5), which facilitated the accurate collection of individual perceptions regarding workplace factors essential for structural analysis. The questionnaire was administered using a secure online platform, and participants were required to complete all items to prevent missing data. The items were presented in random order to reduce order effects, and instructions were clearly stated at the beginning of each section.

Happiness management was measured using the Happiness at Work Scale adapted by Feitor et al. (2022), which consists of five items related to wellbeing, motivation, and satisfaction. Transformational leadership was assessed using the scale by Carless et al. (2000), focused on behaviours such as collaboration and trust-based communication. The scale by Parker and DeCotiis (1983) was employed to measure work stress, addressing symptoms of emotional pressure. Finally, the turnover intention was measured using six items from the instrument developed by Bothma and Roodt (2013) to capture the employees' predisposition to change jobs.

Data analysis technique

Statistical analysis was carried out using Jamovi software (version 2.3.28), an R-based tool recognised for its accessibility and capacity to apply robust methods in quantitative research (Şahin & Aybek, 2019). In the first phase, a univariate descriptive analysis was performed using means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis. Subsequently, Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modelling (CB-SEM) was employed and implemented through the SEMLj module in Jamovi to validate the factorial structure and estimate the latent relationships within the model (Dash & Paul, 2021). In addition, a multigroup analysis (MGA) was conducted to identify possible structural differences between the public and private sectors, following the methodological guidelines of Byrne (2016).

Sociodemographic variables (sex, age, job position, and institution size) were controlled during the model estimation to rule out potential confounding effects on the latent relationships.

RESULTS
Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

To assess the structural validity of the scales, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was applied to the four constructs of the model: Happiness Management, transformational leadership, work stress, and turnover intention. The correlations between items were statistically significant ($p < .001$), with moderate ranges for Happiness Management (0.509-0.732) and stress (0.353-0.604) and high for leadership (0.659-0.868) and turnover intention (0.657-0.794), indicating good internal consistency.

Sampling adequacy was confirmed with KMO values ranging from 0.799 to 0.918, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1974), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant in all cases ($p < .001$). Communalities ranged from 0.513 to 0.869, reflecting an adequate proportion of variance explained by the

items. The total variance explained was 67.88% for Happiness Management, 81.56% for leadership, 59.11% for work stress, and 77.00% for turnover intention.

Structural Equation Modelling

The theoretical model was validated using the Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modelling (CB-SEM) approach, employing Jamovi software. This technique enabled the simultaneous estimation of relationships between latent variables, evaluation of the overall model fit, and interpretation of the validity of the proposed associations. In addition, a multigroup analysis (MGA) was conducted to examine potential structural differences between participants from the public and private sectors. This methodology facilitated the comparison of direct effects in both organisational contexts, providing empirical evidence on how happiness management and work stress are related to turnover intention, depending on the institution where employees work.

Convergent and discriminant validity

To evaluate the quality of the measurements, the convergent validity of the constructs—Happiness Management, transformational leadership, work stress, and turnover intention—was assessed by considering Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 2, all values exceeded the thresholds suggested in the literature (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.762 to 0.955, CR values exceeded 0.70, and AVE values ranged between 0.526 and 0.774, indicating internal consistency and adequate explained variance.

Table 2. *Convergent and discriminant validity.*

		Convergent validity								
		Cronbach's Alpha			Composite Reliability			AVE		
		Full sample	Private	Public	Full sample	Private	Public	Full sample	Private	Public
1	Happiness Management	0.87	0.876	0.865	0.875	0.880	0.875	0.640	0.647	0.645
2	Transformational Leadership	0.955	0.953	0.954	0.944	0.941	0.945	0.774	0.77	0.774
3	Job Stress	0.776	0.784	0.762	0.776	0.781	0.767	0.542	0.554	0.526
4	Turnover Intention	0.940	0.932	0.948	0.941	0.933	0.949	0.727	0.699	0.755

		Discriminant validity							
		HTMT Criterion				Fornell-Larcker Criterion			
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1	Happiness Management					**0.800**			
2	Transformational Leadership	0.734				0.722	**0.880**		
3	Job Stress	0.376	0.279			-0.315	-0.429	**0.736**	
4	Turnover Intention	0.611	0.467	0.437		-0.453	-0.593	0.452	**0.853**

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT index proposed by Henseler et al. (2015). In all cases, the square root of the AVE was greater than the correlations between constructs, and the HTMT values remained below the critical threshold of 0.85, confirming adequate conceptual differentiation between the variables. The lowest value was recorded between transformational leadership and work stress, with an index of 0.279. At the same time, the highest corresponded to the relationship between transformational leadership and Happiness Management, with a value of 0.734, as shown in Table 2.

Fit indices

Subsequently, the quality of the structural model was assessed using absolute, incremental, and parsimonious fit indices (see Table 3). Regarding absolute fit, the CMIN was 393 for the total sample and 597 for the multigroup analysis, with expected significance levels for large samples (p = 0.000) without compromising model validity (Hair et al., 2019). The SRMR values (0.051 and 0.054) and RMSEA (0.064 and 0.071) remained within acceptable ranges, indicating a good fit between observed and estimated data (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Browne &Cudeck, 1992).

In the incremental indices, the CFI and IFI reached 0.963 for the full sample and 0.955 in the MGA, exceeding the 0.900 threshold, as did the TLI, with values of 0.956 and 0.946, reflecting a robust fit. In terms of parsimony, the CMIN/DF ratio was 2.73 and 2.07, within the acceptable range for complex models (Hair et al., 2019), while the PGFI reached 0.678 and 0.675, confirming a good balance between fit and structural simplicity (Mulaik et al., 1989).

Table 3. *Measures of fit*

Type of fit	Fit measure	Acceptance level	Full sample	MGA	Acceptability
Absolute or global	CMIN	CMIN = double of DF	393	597	Acceptable
	P value	> 0.05	0.000	0.000	Marginal
	SRMR	< 0.08	0.051	0.054	Acceptable
	RMSEA	< 0.08	0.064	0.071	Acceptable
Incremental	CFI	> 0.900	0.963	0.955	Acceptable
	IFI	> 0.900	0.963	0.955	Acceptable
	TLI	> 0.900	0.956	0.946	Acceptable
Parsimonious	CMIN/DF	> 2	2.73	2.07	Acceptable
	PGFI	> 0.500	0.678	0.675	Acceptable

Note. The significance level for all model fit tests was set at $p < 0.05$.

Multigroup analysis

A multigroup analysis (MGA) was conducted to identify potential differences in the structural relationships of the model between the public and private sectors. Prior to this, factorial invariance was assessed using configural, metric, and scalar models, ensuring the model structure's equivalence across groups. It allowed for a valid interpretation of the observed differences in the structural coefficients. Once invariance was confirmed, the hypotheses were tested, revealing relevant differences in the influence of transformational leadership, Happiness Management, and work stress on turnover intention depending on the type of institution.

Invariance analysis

To ensure the validity of comparisons in the multigroup analysis (MGA), factorial invariance between the public and private sector groups was assessed using configural, metric, and scalar models (see Table 4). The configural model, without constraints, showed a good fit (X^2 = 597, CFI = 0.955, RMSEA = 0.071, SRMR = 0.054), indicating factorial stability between groups, following the methodological guidelines proposed by Cheung and Rensvold (2002). When constraints were imposed in the metric model, the CFI slightly decreased to 0.953 (ΔCFI = 0.002) and the SRMR increased to 0.063, remaining within acceptable ranges. In the scalar model, the CFI dropped to 0.950 (ΔCFI = 0.003) and the SRMR reached 0.064. According to Byrne (2016), these variations are below the critical thresholds, confirming the existence of configural, metric, and scalar invariance, thus allowing valid comparisons between the groups.

Table 4. *Fit indices for invariance models.*

Model	X^2	ΔX^2	CFI	ΔCFI	RMSEA	ΔRMSEA	SRMR	AIC	BIC
Configural	597		0.955		0.071		0.054	21508.37	22033.912
Metric	626	-29	0.953	0.002	0.071	0	0.063	21507.887	21972.798
Scalar	662	-36	0.950	0.003	0.072	-0.001	0.064	21513.271	21917.535

Hypothesis testing

- The results of the hypothesis testing, presented in Table 5, reveal significant effects in several of the proposed structural relationships. For H1, which proposes that transformational leadership positively influences Happiness Management, a significant effect was observed in the total sample (ß = 0.722), with consistent values in the private sector (ß = 0.682) and public sector (ß = 0.740), and a slight difference between both contexts (Δ = -0.058), indicating that this relationship remains strong in both organisational realities.

- Regarding H2, which posits that leadership impacts levels of work stress, the results showed a contrasting pattern: the effect was not significant in the total sample (ß = -0.011) but negative and significant in the private sector (ß = -0.247) and positive, although not significant, in the public sector (ß = 0.205), with a marked difference (Δ = -0.452). It suggests that leadership is a buffer for stress only in private contexts. For H3, referring to the effect of leadership on turnover intention, the result was not significant in the total sample (ß = -0.051) but significant and negative in the private sector (ß = -0.278), while in the public sector, the effect was positive and not significant (ß = 0.137), with a relevant difference (Δ = -0.415).

- H4, which evaluates the effect of Happiness Management on turnover intention, showed adverse and highly significant effects across all groups: total sample (ß = -0.452), private (ß = -0.412), and public (ß = -0.549), with a magnitude difference between sectors (Δ = 0.137), reflecting a more significant impact in the public sector. Similarly, H5 confirmed an adverse effect of Happiness Management on work stress in the total sample (ß = -0.421), as well as in the private sector (ß = -0.372) and public sector (ß = -0.427), with a slight difference (Δ = 0.055). For H6, which explores the link between work stress and turnover intention, the results indicated a positive and significant effect in all three scenarios: total sample (ß = 0.242), private (ß = 0.163), and public (ß = 0.256), with a moderate difference (Δ = -0.093).

Regarding indirect effects, H7 identified that leadership influences turnover intention through Happiness Management , with a significant effect found in the total sample (ß = -0.326), as well as in the private sector (ß = -0.281) and public sector (ß = -0.407), with a difference of Δ = 0.126, indicating a stronger mediation in the public sector. Regarding H8, although the indirect path from transformational leadership to turnover intention through work stress was theoretically plausible, the empirical analysis revealed that this mediation effect was not statistically significant in any group (ß = -0.003 full sample; -0.040 private; 0.052 public). This result suggests that while leadership may influence stress levels, its indirect impact on turnover intention via this route is limited. One possible explanation is that stress alone may not fully capture the emotional mechanisms that mediate leadership's influence on mobility decisions. This opens an avenue for future research to examine alternative or complementary mediators such as burnout, psychological safety, or coping strategies.

Table 5. *Hypothesis testing.*

Hypothesis	Variable	Full sample	Private	Public	MGA Diff	Hypothesissupported
		Direct effects				
H1	HM <--- LEAD	0.722 ***	0.682 ***	0.740 ***	-0.058	Yes (bothsectors)
H2	JS <--- LEAD	-0.011	-0.247 **	0.205	-0.452	Yes (privateonly)
H3	TI <--- LEAD	-0.051	-0.278 ***	0.137	-0.415	Yes (privateonly)
H4	TI <--- HM	-0.452 ***	-0.412 ***	-0.549 ***	0.137	Yes (bothsectors)
H5	JS <--- HM	-0.421 ***	-0.372 ***	-0.427 **	0.055	Yes (bothsectors)
H6	TI <--- JS	0.242 ***	0.163 **	0.256 ***	-0.093	Yes (bothsectors)
		Indirect effects				
H7	TI <--- HM <--- LEAD	-0.326 ***	-0.281 ***	-0.407 ***	0.126	Yes (bothsectors)
H8	TI <--- JS <--- LEAD	-0.003	-0.040	0.052	-0.092	No

Note. *, ** and *** denote statistical significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.
Source: Own elaboration

Figure 2 illustrates the final structural model for the full sample, incorporating direct and indirect relationships among the variables, along with the observed sectoral variations. The figure visually confirms the significant pathways, particularly the strong influence of transformational leadership on happiness management and its downstream effects on stress and turnover intention. While the mediation of happiness management is supported across both sectors, the figure also makes clear that the indirect path through work stress (H8) remains statistically non-significant. The diagram facilitates a clearer understanding of the model's internal dynamics and the differences in magnitude between public and private contexts, reinforcing the need for context-sensitive strategies in human resource policies.
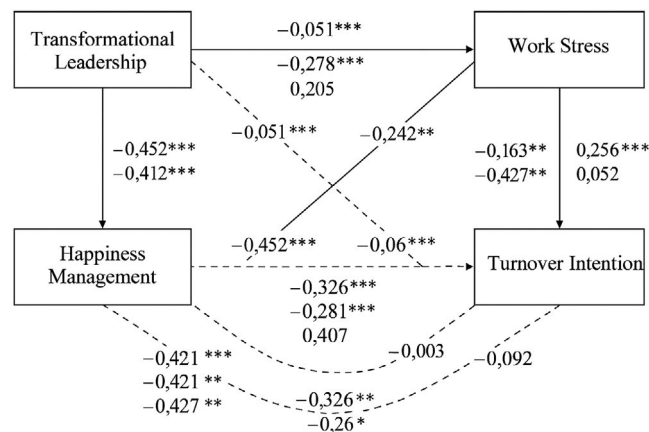

Figure 2. *Proposed final model.*

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that transformational leadership plays a significant role in enhancing happiness management and, in turn, reducing turnover intention. This relationship was confirmed in both public and private sectors (H1), reinforcing prior research which underscores the ability of transformational leaders to foster emotionally supportive environments that promote satisfaction and commitment (Çakır & Özgenel, 2024; Kaur & Kaur, 2023). However, the influence of leadership on work stress (H2) was only significant in the private sector, indicating that contextual organisational conditions may mediate the stress-buffering potential of leadership (Adiguna & Suwandana, 2023). Similarly, leadership's effect on reducing turnover intention (H3) was only significant in the private sector, perhaps due to differing perceptions of job security and institutional rigidity.

Happiness management was shown to significantly reduce both work stress (H5) and turnover intention (H4), with even stronger effects in the public sector. This supports recent literature that positions emotional wellbeing as a strategic lever for talent retention, especially in bureaucratic or emotionally taxing environments (Zhu & Chang, 2025; Ravina-Ripoll et al., 2021). Work stress itself (H6) had a positive impact on turnover intention, particularly within the public sector, where systemic factors such as red tape and lack of recognition may elevate psychological burden (Bas, 2022; Kim & Kim, 2024).

Regarding indirect effects, the study confirmed that transformational leadership reduces turnover intention via happiness management (H7), reinforcing its role as a key emotional mediator. Conversely, the mediating effect of work stress (H8) was not statistically significant, suggesting that stress alone may not sufficiently explain how leadership influences decisions to stay or leave. This insight opens a path for future studies to consider broader emotional or psychosocial mediators such as burnout, psychological safety, or organisational justice.

This study set out to examine the influence of transformational leadership on turnover intention in the Mexican context, considering the mediating roles of happiness management and work-related stress. It also aimed to explore sectoral differences between public and private institutions. The results successfully addressed these objectives by demonstrating that emotional factors, particularly happiness management, play a decisive role in shaping retention dynamics.

One of the principal contributions of this research lies in positioning happiness management as a central construct in organisational behaviour. While previous studies have often explored wellbeing in fragmented ways, this study integrates it into a broader emotional and structural framework, providing empirical evidence of its power to mediate the effects of leadership and reduce both stress and turnover intention. In doing so, it establishes happiness management not only as an outcome of good leadership but as a strategic lever in its own right—essential for emotional regulation and employee retention in both sectors.

Theoretically, the proposed model contributes to the advancement of Social Exchange Theory by embedding psycho-emotional mechanisms into its explanatory structure. By showing that leadership influences are transmitted not just through transactional exchanges but through affective perceptions of wellbeing, the study redefines the scope of leadership influence and organisational reciprocity. Moreover, identifying sectoral differences deepens the field's understanding of how contextual variables shape these processes, revealing that public and private sector dynamics demand tailored emotional strategies.

This study provides meaningful contributions to understanding turnover intention; however, several limitations should be considered, such as the cross-sectional design limiting causal inference, as data were collected at a single point. Longitudinal studies are recommended to observe how transformational leadership, Happiness Management, and work stress influence turnover intention over time. Additionally, the sample was limited to the Mexican context, restricting generalisability. Future research should replicate the model in other Latin American countries and consider additional segmentation variables, such as gender, age, or job level, to capture more diverse organisational dynamics.

Moreover, although the model included key constructs, it excluded other potentially influential factors such as organisational culture, communication style, or perceived salary. Incorporating these elements in future studies could enhance the model's explanatory power. It would also be helpful to explore the long-term effects of Happiness Management, primarily in organisations undergoing structural or cultural changes. Analysing how wellbeing strategies adapt to shifting environments would offer evidence to design more resilient and sustainable organizational policies.

CONCLUSIONS

From a practical perspective, the findings encourage organisations to adopt differentiated approaches. In the private sector, where turnover is often linked to perceived instability, happiness management emerges as a crucial asset, requiring targeted interventions to promote emotional satisfaction, recognition, and empathetic leadership. In contrast, the public sector must address structural stressors and implement wellbeing-oriented leadership practices to enhance stability and commitment.

At a societal level, the study underscores the broader value of emotional health in the workplace. Reducing turnover not only stabilises labour markets and reduces organisational costs but also contributes to mental health, family wellbeing, and more resilient professional cultures. In this regard, the findings align with Sustainable Development Goal 8 by highlighting the need for emotionally sustainable work environments as part of inclusive economic growth.

This research enriches the theoretical, practical, and social conversation around organisational wellbeing, positioning happiness management as a vital component of effective leadership and talent retention in differentiated institutional contexts.

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