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Transformational Leadership Effect on Public Sector Employee Retention: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Transformational leadership is considered an important leadership approach that can affect the employees' experience at work and organizational commitment. However, there is a need for an overall analysis of the leadership dimensions and indicators discussed in current research to understand its relationship with employee retention in the public sector. In this research, a systematic literature review (SLR) has been conducted on 50 articles, based on the PRISMA methodology, about the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention in the public sector. The objective of this paper is to highlight the major themes and indicators used to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention. The review finds six main themes, which are idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, empowerment and vision building with eleven indicators. Individualized consideration was the most common theme, followed by intellectual stimulation. Career development was the most frequently reported indicator. The findings offer a systematic overview of dominant areas of scholarly attention and highlight comparatively less scrutinized dimensions such as vision building and empowerment. This review provides a foundation to comprehend the conceptualization of transformational leadership in public sector retention research and provides direction for future empirical study.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Employee Retention, Public Sector, Retention Intention, Systematic Review

Introduction

A stable and committed workforce for public service organizations is a pre-condition for the continuity and quality of public service. But recruiting and retaining qualified employees has become a top organizational concern as public institutions struggle to keep up with changing workforce expectations, difficult work environments and competition for skilled employees (Atairet & Ndaeyo, 2022; Sree, et al., 2022). In addition, (Almashyakhi, 2024) regarded the

employee turnover as the loss of employees from the organization while employee retention is the ability of the organization to keep its employees. Besides, (Atairet & Ndaeyo, 2022; Xuecheng, et al., 2022) ensured that high turnover results in loss of knowledge, increased recruitment and training costs, service disruption, and difficulty retaining experienced staff. Therefore, research on public sector employees has increasingly focused on factors influencing employees' decisions to stay or leave their organizations, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement, leadership and working conditions (Barkhuizen & Gumede, 2021; Elrayah & Mabkhot, 2023).

Leadership is one of the organizational factors that may influence the employees' experiences and attitudes toward work and organization. One of the leadership styles that have been studied extensively is transformational leadership which includes developing a common vision, motivating employees, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration (Romi, et al., 2022). Transformational leaders inspire employees to exceed expectations and develop them by connecting their efforts with the larger organizational objectives. Such features are especially important in the public sector, where the commitment and motivation of employees is directly related to the ability of institutions to provide services efficiently. Recent research in public administration still finds links between transformational leadership and employee attitudes, motivation, commitment and work behaviors (Barkhuizen & Gumede, 2021; Aljanahi, et al., 2023).

Mostly, studies that have looked at the link between transformational leadership and staff retention have had positive results (Belhaj, 2024; Butaiba, et al., 2025; Džambi´c, et al., 2025). The relationship has been studied, however, for other retention-related outcomes. Transformational leadership has been shown in previous research to reduce turnover intention and voluntary turnover (Ntirandekura, et al., 2022; Yuniasih, et al., 2022). Other studies have connected the effects of transformational leadership with company commitment, employee engagement and workplace culture (Khoso, et al., 2021; Amankwaa & Seet, 2022). As such, transformational leadership has been found to decrease turnover intention by increasing organizational commitment. Moreover, employee engagement and collaborative organizational culture have been identified as potential drive through which leadership affects employees' intention to stay. Recently, these relationships are still being investigated in various public organizations and countries (Alkarabsheh, et al., 2022; Donkor, et al., 2022; Adalin, et al., 2025; Al-Rabiey, et al., 2024). However, the evidence is spread across different public sector organizations, occupational groups, countries and theoretical perspectives, making it difficult to gain a full understanding of how transformational leadership contributes to employee retention.

Problem Statement

Employee turnover in the public sector is considered a major challenge, particularly amid the rapid development of competitive work environments, Meanwhile, employee retention reflects an organisation's ability to retain its employees (Almashyakhi, 2024). For instance, when highly experienced employees leave public sector organisations, services are disrupted and their quality declines of services. As a result, other capable employees may begin to consider leaving as part of their future plans. (Atairet & Ndaeyo, 2022; Xuecheng, et al., 2022). When competition from other entities to attract quality employees increases, the burden on the public sector increases. This requires increasing expenditure on training the employees to

upgrade the competencies of new employees with less experience. All of this is to address the shortage resulting from employee turnover (Atairet & Ndaeyo, 2022; Sree, et al., 2022).

The issue of retaining high-quality employees occurs not just in one sector or institution, but in all public sectors, be it administrative, financial, medical, and across different countries worldwide, depending on the various factors influencing such a decision. (Alkarabsheh, et al., 2022; Donkor, et al., 2022; Al-Rabiey, et al., 2024; Adalin, et al., 2025). The significance of this issue escalates in public sector organizations directly providing services to beneficiaries, where the onus of ensuring uninterrupted services is on the continuous availability of human resources. Transformational leadership is also regarded as one of the most important contemporary approaches to retaining employees and reducing turnover. (Ntirandekura, et al., 2022; Yuniasih, et al., 2022), Furthermore, it has a clear relationship stronger organisational commitment, employee engagement and a collaborative workplace culture among employees within the work environment (Khoso, et al., 2021; Amankwaa & Seet, 2022).

The problem can be explained more clearly by examining all aspects related to transformational leadership, given that many previous studies have associated it with employee retention in the work environment (Estherita & Vasantha, 2023; Elrayah & Mabkhot, 2023; Donkor, et al., 2022; Moon & Lim, 2026).The results are unclear as to which 'transformational leadership' behaviours have been studied, highlighting the need to clarify which leadership dimensions directly affecting this relationship.

Moreover, earlier studies did not adopt a specific approach in discussing the association between the variables. Some studies looked at the extent of the intention to stay of employees, and others focussed on the extent of organisational commitment. Thus, the results are scattered and unclear. Moreover, many studies have focused on presenting the overall results of transformational leadership measurement by treating it as a single variable, without measuring the effects of its individual dimensions separately: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. In addition, the dimensions of Vision Building and Empowerment have received insufficient attention in theoretical studies ,On the other hand, it can be argued that there is a lack of clarity in identifying the leadership behaviours that have received sufficient research attention, particularly in relation to employee retention. This creates difficulties for researchers in recognising and identifying the research gap.

Therefore, this review seeks to assist researchers by collecting relevant studies, identifying their examined dimensions, determining the associated behaviours, and classifying those examined dimensions in a clear and systematic manner, while comparing their frequency of occurrence according to a framework. This is intended to contribute to assisting researchers in addressing the actual research needs in this area, following the PRISMA 2020 framework.

Research Questions

To address this problem, the review answers the following questions:

RQ1: How are the included studies distributed by organisational setting, research design and geographical region?

RQ2: Which transformational leadership themes and indicators have been studied in relation to public sector employee retention?
RQ3: How frequently is each theme and indicator reported in the studies, and are there statistically significant differences within each theme?
RQ4: Which dimensions of transformational leadership have received the least research attention in relation to public sector employee retention?
RQ1 is answered in Section 3.1, RQ2 in Section 3.2, RQ3 in Section 3.3 and RQ4 in Sections 4 and 5.

Method

This systematic literature review was carried out based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page, et al., 2021) and the standard recommendations of (Moher, et al., 2009). Such guidelines provide a better guide on transparent reporting of systematic reviews in the search, screening, appraisal, and synthesis of relevant studies. Moreover, reflections from the previous literature mainly (Afriana, et al., 2026) were also employed for format and methodology to make the reporting as comprehensive as possible. The process of mapping in this SLR consists of four related steps following the previous work of (Page, et al., 2021).

Step One: Search Strategies

At first, it is essential to narrow the search to specific domains using appropriate search strategies. The literature search was executed in five scientific databases mainly: IEEE Xplore, Scopus, ScienceDirect, Web of Science and manual Search. Search for studies on transformational leadership and public employee retention outcome in titles, abstracts and keywords. The search was restricted to journal articles, conference proceedings and book chapters published from 2021 to 2026, a recent period of six years. In the search of each database, the selected keywords were combined with the logical operators OR and AND, and wildcards were used in the advanced search. The refined search was conducted in all five databases, but still gave a large number of publications. Therefore, a more generic search string was prepared and used in titles, abstracts and keywords of the literature to further narrow the set. Table 1 presents the domain focus, keywords, search scheme and general search string for the review.

Table 1
Search strategies

Domain focus	Keywords	Search scheme	Search string
Transformational leadership	Transformational leadership, ‘‘transformational leader’’, employee retention, public sector	Title, abstract, and keywords	("transformational leadership" OR "transformational leader*") AND ("turnover intention" OR retention OR "intention to stay" OR "turnover intentions" (“public sector" OR government OR "public administration”)

The strategy in Table 2, run across the 5 databases found 2,164 studies. The most recent search was 30/09/2026. Relevant publications were then identified in accordance with the PRISMA standards (Page, et al., 2021). Duplicates were removed in Mendeley with 406 articles that passed screening. Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart showing the flow of studies through the different phases of the review.

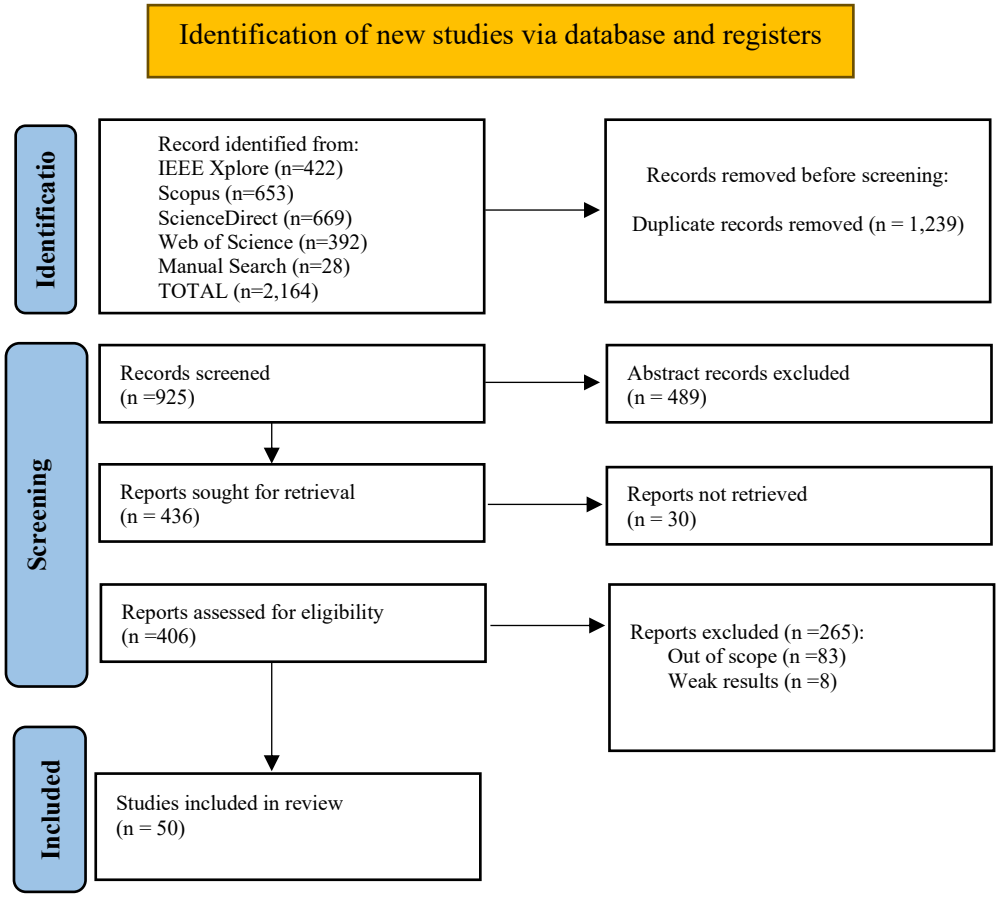


Figure 1 PRISMA 2020 flowchart

Step Two: Screening Process

After the database search with the identified keywords and the general search string was completed, the 794 unique papers retrieved were screened in three rounds: an initial round applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, followed by two rounds of rating. The assessment was carried out by two of the authors (M.M. Almutairi and M.M. Farea) who achieved consensus on the final screening decisions.

Inclusion and Exclusion Round

At the screening stage, each retrieved paper was assessed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 2. The criteria determined the selection of papers that were directly relevant to the present paper, and any paper that did not meet them was rejected.

Table 2
Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Year of Publication	2021 – 2026	Not between 2021 - 2026
Article Type	Journal papers, conference proceedings, and book chapters.	Review papers, tutorials, seminars, interviews, letters, or blogs.
Language	English	Non-English
Relevance	Related to the research aim	Not related to the research aim
Availability	Open access	Not open access

Round of Screening Ratings
The relevance of each paper to transformational leadership and employee retention was judged from its title, abstract and conclusion in the first round of rating. All papers were screened to confirm whether they were on the topic of transformational leadership or one of its components in relation to retention, so as to not miss any relevant paper. However, in the titles, abstracts and conclusions of the screened papers, it was often unclear which leadership components had been studied, and therefore it was not always possible to determine relevance at this stage reliably. After the first round a total of 123 papers remained, not enough to meet the aims of the review and so a second round was necessary.

In the second rating round, the full paper text was searched for the components of transformational leadership and their indicators such as role modeling, individualized consideration, empowerment and vision building. The search was performed using the find function of Adobe acrobat reader pro (Version 2023.001.20174 64 Bits). This procedure yielded 406 papers which were selected for further analysis.

Step Three: Eligibility and Quality Assessment
The 406 remaining papers were assessed for eligibility and quality (E&QA) before being included in the final list of included papers. Table 4 shows the criteria used in this assessment and the score assigned to each response: 1 for ‘agree’, 0.5 for ‘partly agree’ and 0 for ‘disagree’. The assessment was to ensure that the final selection of papers included papers that had clearly defined objectives, well explained methodologies, acknowledged limitations and clear findings.

Table 3
Eligibility and quality assessment scoring criteria

Criteria	Score	Description
Well-defined objectives?	1	Absolutely, the article clearly outlines its objectives and goals.
	0.5	The article outlines its objectives, though the goals are not explicitly defined.
	0	No, the article does not have well-defined objectives.
Well-explained methodology?	1	Definitely, the article provides a comprehensive, and well-documented methodology.
	0.5	Partially documented methodology that needs more details.
	0	No, the article fails to provide a well-explained methodology.
Declared limitations?	1	Exactly, the limitations are clearly declared in the article.
	0.5	Somehow, the limitations are not in full detail.
	0	No, no limitations are mentioned in this article.
Clear research findings?	1	Definitely, the article gives a clear image of its findings.
	0.5	The article does present its findings, but not in clear statement.
	0	The article's findings are ambiguous, and lacking elaboration.

Here, the scoring criteria in Table 4 were applied, giving each paper a score between 0 and 4, with 4 indicating an excellent-quality paper. The selection was limited to high-quality studies only; thus, the minimum score for inclusion was 3.5 as shown in Figure 2. From this, 50 of the 406 studies were classified as eligible and included in the qualitative synthesis, while the others were classified as ineligible and excluded. Decisions to exclude studies not meeting the scoring criteria were made by two authors (M.M. Almutairi and M.M. Farea) following a full assessment of the paper's eligibility and quality, not a quick decision.

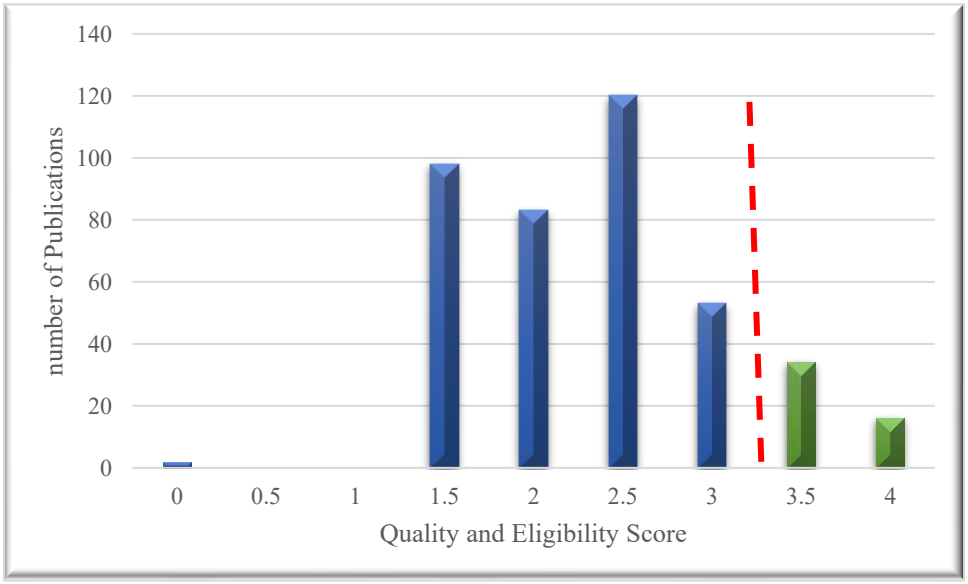


Figure 2 Papers quality score distribution

Step Four: Data Extraction and Compilation of Included Papers
Once the E&QA was completed, the selected studies and their meta-data were downloaded from the scientific sources and organized in a spreadsheet, available from the Data Availability

section. Two authors (M.M. Almutairi and M.M. Farea) collected the metadata. The metadata included title, abstract, author, volume, number, pages, publisher, secondary title, place of publication, keywords, reference type, year of publication, objectives, transformational leadership themes, retention outcomes, country, sector, and research design. To achieve the aim of this SLR, a total of 50 studies were included and analyzed in depth.

Table 4
Papers retrieved in each step of the SLR process

Database	Articles Identified	Articles Pass Screening	Articles Pass Eligibility Assessment	Articles Included
IEEE Xplore	422	91	9	9
Scopus	653	122	12	12
ScienceDirect	669	113	16	16
Web of Science	392	72	11	11
Manual Search	28	8	2	2
Total	**2,164**	**406**	**50**	**50**

This SLR included only studies with explicit objectives, clear methodologies, declared limitations and stated results. As shown in Table 4, high quality and relevant studies are mainly found in ScienceDirect (16 papers, 32%), followed by Scopus (12 papers, 24%) and Web of Science (11 papers, 22%), IEEE Xplore (9 papers, 18%) and Manual search contributes only two papers (4%). Figure 3 shows the distribution of the papers included in the study among the scientific databases.

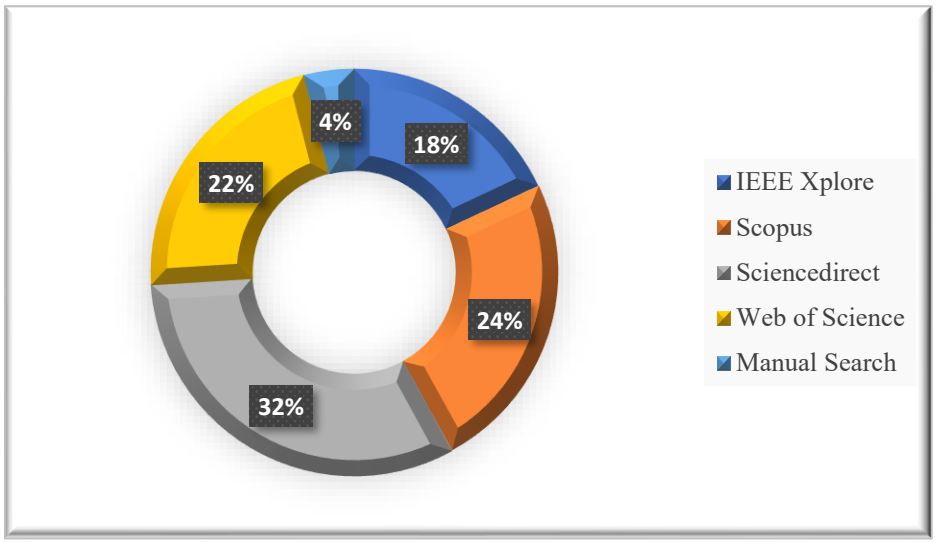


Figure 3 Included papers distribution through scientific databases

Results

Fifty articles met the eligibility criteria and were included in the final review. The articles selected took into account the connection between transformational leadership and employee retention in different public sector organizations with special regard to turnover intention, intention to stay and organizational commitment. Table 5 presents the bibliographic data of the 50 included articles with information about the authors, year of

publication, research setting, measurement instruments and statistical analysis techniques. One of the central trends identified in the selected articles is the study of transformational leadership in relation to employee retention and outcomes. Transformational leadership has been studied within the framework of organizations in previous studies (Oh & Chhinzer, 2021; Saira, et al., 2021; Yücel, 2021) and leadership and employee-related outcomes in recent studies (Ali, et al., 2024; Rodrigues, et al., 2025; Vu, et al., 2025). The organizational settings are also different such as government institutions, public hospitals, public universities, state owned enterprises and other public organizations. This variant is a more comprehensive view for the analysis of transformational leadership in different contexts of the public sector. When using studies from other organizational settings, care has to be taken to establish their relevance to the review's focus. Collectively, these studies demonstrate a continued interest in the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' retention and turnover intentions in the public sector.

The chosen articles also touch upon a number of outcomes related to employee retention such as turnover intention, intention to stay and organizational commitment. These related concepts provide different perspectives to examine the relationship between leadership and employees' willingness to remain as members of the organization. The selected papers are therefore diverse in topic, which provides a basis for synthesizing existing findings and identifying how transformational leadership may contribute to employee retention in public sector organizations.

Table 5
Bibliographic Information of Included Articles

No	Author (s), Year	Country	Study Design	Setting	Measurement	Statistical Analysis
1	(Alasiry & Alkhaldi, 2024)	Saudi	Cross-sectional study	Government hospital	Modified questionnaire	Pearson correlation, Multiple regression
2	(Ali, et al., 2024)	Saudi	Cross-sectional, SEM	Public sector	MLQ	PLS-SEM
3	(Alshebl, 2022)	Saudi	Cross-sectional, SEM	Public banking sector	MLQ	PLS-SEM
4	(Donkor, et al., 2022)	Ghana	Cross-sectional, SEM	State-owned enterprises	MLQ	PLS-SEM
5	(Estherita & Vasantha, 2023)	India	Cross-sectional	Small scale enterprises	Modified questionnaire	SEM
6	(Georg, et al., 2021)	USA	Case study	East Asian multinational corporation	MLQ	Pearson correlation, Multiple regression
7	(Kariuki, et al., 2022)	Kenya	Cross-sectional	Microfinance institutions	Modified questionnaire	PLS-SEM

8	(Li, et al., 2023)	China	Cross-sectional study	Energy-intensive industry	MLQ	PLS-SEM
9	(Ntseke, Mitonga-Monga, & Hoole, 2022)	South Africa	Case study	Engineering organization	Modified questionnaire	Descriptive analysis, Multiple regression
10	(Oh & Chhinzer, 2021)	China	Case study	Public organizations	MLQ	Descriptive analysis, Multiple regression
11	(Quek, et al., 2021)	UK	Cross-sectional	Public hospital	Modified questionnaire	Inferential statistics
12	(Upadhyay, et al., 2022)	India	Cross-sectional study		MLQ	Inferential statistics
13	(Ibrahim, et al., 2024)	Saudi	Cross-sectional study	King Khalid Hospital	Self-administered handwritten questionnaires	Inferential statistics, Process macro.
14	(Cosmin, 2024)	Germany		Public institutions	Questionnaire and interview	Descriptive analysis, Inferential statistics
15	(Rahaman, et al., 2026)	Bangladesh	Deductive, quantitative, cross-sectional study	Eight Export Processing Zones	Self-administered questionnaire	PLS-SEM
16	(Sreedisha & Celina, 2026)	India	A quantitative research design	Indian IT sector	Adopted survey	PLS-SEM
17	(Khan, et al., 2024)	Australia	Time-lag approach	Tourism sector	Self-administered questionnaire	PLS-SEM
18	(Rodrigues, et al., 2025)	Portugal	Cross-sectional study	Public organizations	Self-administered questionnaire	PLS-SEM
19	(Lesnik & Kada, 2026)	Australia	Qualitative case study	Public healthcare	semi structured interviews and focus group discussions	Deductive categorization
20	(Vu, et al., 2025)	Vietnam	A quantitative approach	Public sector	Self-administrated survey	PLS-SEM
21	(Phinaitrup, 2026)	Thailand	Delphi method	Thai state-owned enterprises	Developed questionnaire	Three-round Delphi method

22	(Islam, et al., 2025)	USA	A quantitative approach	Amazon Mechanical Turk	Survey	PLS-SEM
23	(Diko & Saxena, 2023)	Ethiopia	Cross-sectional	Public higher education institutions	Self-administrated survey	SEM
24	(Martins, et al., 2023)	Portugal	Quantitative, cross-sectional	Public hospital	Survey	SEM
25	(Heever & Botha, 2026)	South Africa	Quantitative, cross-sectional	Steel-manufacturing company	MLQ	PLS-SEM
26	(Belhaj, 2024)	Yemen	A quantitative approach	Public organizations in Hadhramaut governorate	MLQ	Descriptive analysis, Inferential statistics
27	(Eryanto, et al., 2025)	Indonesia	A quantitative approach	Public organizations	Survey	PLS-SEM
28	(Lopez, et al., 2025)	Chile	Cross-sectional study	Public educational organizations in Chile	online questionnaire	PLS-SEM
29	(Meurer, et al., 2024)	Brazil	Quantitative approach	Brazilian family businesses	Adopted survey	Linear regression
30	(Sobaih, et al., 2021)	Egypt	Cross-sectional study	Deluxe hotels	Adopted survey	PLS-SEM
31	(Džambi´c, et al., 2025)	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Quantitative	IT sector professionals	Questionnaire	SEM
32	(Saira, et al., 2021)	Pakistan	Cross-sectional	Textile industry	Survey	Inferential statistics
33	(Nazarian, et al., 2026)	UK	Cross-sectional	Independent hotels	Cross-cultural survey	SEM
34	(Moon & Lim, 2026)	South Korea	Cross-sectional study	Government employees	Survey	Inferential statistics
35	(Alkarabsheh, et al., 2022)	Jordan	Cross-sectional study	Public hospitals	Questionnaire	Inferential statistics
36	(Jia & Li, 2024)	China	Quantitative	Software engineers	Survey	SEM
37	(Zielińska, et al., 2026)	Poland	Cross-sectional	IT knowledge workers	Questionnaire	PLS-SEM
38	(Yücel, 2021)	Turkey	Cross-sectional	Healthcare professionals	Questionnaire	SEM

39	(Luo, et al., 2026)	China	Cross-sectional survey	Public hospitals	MLQ-5X	SEM
40	(Thomas & Aurora, 2024)	Canada	Model-based study	Public organizations	Secondary data	Agent-based modeling
41	(Katfi, et al., 2025)	Morrocco	Cross-sectional	Transportation services company	Modified Questionnaire	PLS-SEM
42	(Elshaer, et al., 2025)	Egypt	Cross-sectional study	Hospitality sector	Adopted Survey	SEM
43	(Aljanahi, et al., 2023)	UAE	Quantitative approach	Public school	Modified Questionnaire	Descriptive analysis, Inferential statistics
44	(Adalin, et al., 2025)	Saudi Arabia	Cross-sectional study	Public hospitals	MLQ-5X	Inferential statistics
45	(Butaiba, et al., 2025)	Bahrain	Cross-sectional study	Customs Affairs / public sector	Adopted survey	Inferential statistics
46	(Krishna, et al., 2022)	India	Cross-sectional study	Public sector	Modified questionnaire	PLS-SEM
47	(Edonomokumor, et al., 2025)	Nigeria	Quantitative approach	National oil and gas company	Administering print-based questionnaires	CB-SEM
48	(Opolot, et al., 2025)	Uganda	Cross-sectional study	Public higher education institutions	Self-administrated survey	SEM
49	(Dias, et al., 2022)	Portugal	Cross-sectional study	Public sector	Adopted survey	PLS-SEM
50	(Al-Rabiey, et al., 2024)	Yemen	Cross-sectional study	Public universities	Self-administrated questionnaire	Inferential statistics

Distribution and Categorization of the Included Articles

The distribution and classification of the 50 studies included in this systematic literature review by their organizational context, research design and geographical location is shown in Table 6. Government organizations (including state owned enterprises) were the largest group of organizational settings with 22 studies (44%). Nine studies (18%) are from public healthcare institutions and five studies (10%) from public educational institutions. The remaining 14 studies (28%) examine other public-sector settings. The distribution indicates that the reviewed literature covers a wide variety of public sector contexts, with a strong emphasis on government organizations and state-owned enterprises.

In terms of the research designs, quantitative approaches prevail with 41 studies (82%). Six studies (12%) are qualitative in nature, involving interviews and focus groups. Three studies (6%) are mixed method. This spread is indicative of the dominance of quantitative studies in the investigation of the relationship of transformational leadership and employee retention. Qualitative and mixed-method research provide complementary views to the relationship. The geographical distribution revealed that Asia had the highest proportion of studies with 14 studies (28%), followed by the Middle East and Africa with 10 studies (20%). Nine studies (18%) were from Europe, five studies (10%) from America and two studies (4%) from Australia. To summarize, the distribution reflects the international nature of the literature chosen and indicates diversity in the organizational environments and research methodologies employed in the study of transformational leadership and employee retention in the public sector.

Table 6
Distribution and classification Illustration of studies

Category	Number of Studies	Percentage (%)
Setting		
Government including state-owned	22	44%
Public healthcare	9	18%
Public educational institutions	5	10%
Other public sector settings	14	28%
Study Design		
Quantitative (Surveys, CB-SEM, PLS-SEM)	41	82.0%
Qualitative (Interviews, Focus Groups)	6	12.0%
Mixed-Methods	3	6.0%
Geographic Distribution		
Middle East	10	20%
America	5	10%
Europe	9	18%
Asia	14	28%
Africa	10	20%
Australia	2	4%

Transformational Leadership harbingers for Employee Retention

A systematic review of 50 selected articles identified indicators related to transformational leadership and employee retention in the public sector. These indicators were derived from the organization of the research findings and the grouping of similar concepts found in the selected articles into broader themes which explain how transformational leadership influences the decisions of employees to stay in their organizations. The findings suggested that transformational leadership can be conceptualized through six main themes:

i. Idealized influence, which is about role modelling, trust and respect that enhance leaders' credibility and build employees' confidence in leadership.
ii. Individualized Consideration that mainly focus on commitment and career development by paying attention to individual needs of employees, professional growth and organizational attachment.
iii. Intellectual Stimulation as it is about creativity and problem solving. You challenge your employees to generate new ideas, solve workplace problems and contribute to the improvement of the organization.

iv. Inspirational motivation, which is based on encouragement and positive performance, by setting common goals, motivational expectations and support for the performance of employees.
v. Empowerment which is focusing on competence and engagement that is, employees' ability, participation, and involvement in organizational activities.
vi. Vision building as it is about communicating a common direction for the organization and aligning employees to common goals, potentially increasing their sense of purpose and willingness to stay with the organization.

Eleven indicators were identified under these six themes: role modelling, trust and respect, commitment, career development, creativity, problem solving, encouragement, positive performance, competence, engagement, vision building and employee involvement. Together these indicators provide a framework to investigate the possibility of transformational leadership to promote employee retention in the public sector through trust, professional development, motivation, intellectual contribution, shared vision and employee participation.

Table 6
Transformational Leadership harbingers for Employee Retention

Theme	Indicator	Article No.	Retention implication
Idealized influence	Role modelling	(2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 25, 26, 29, 30, 35, 39, 40, 41, 44, 50)	Medium loyalty and trust pathways retention relevance.
	Trust and respect	(1, 3, 7, 9, 10, 11, 25, 26, 29, 30, 35, 39, 40, 41, 44, 49)	
Individualized consideration	Commitment	(3, 9, 10, 11, 14, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 37, 38, 42, 43)	Most critical dimension for retention because it is the one that most consistently leads to the employee's sense of being valued and supported.
	Career development	(1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 35, 39, 40, 41, 24, 34, 44, 45, 46, 47, 50)	
Intellectual stimulation	Creativity	(1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 31, 32, 35, 36, 35, 40, 41, 44, 50)	indirectly highly retention relevant, as it strengthens growth, competence and meaningful work, which can lower leaving intentions.
	Problem solving	(7, 10, 12, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 35, 39, 40, 41, 34, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49)	
Inspirational motivation	Encouragement	(1, 2, 4, 5, 6 7, 8, 16, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 35, 39, 40, 41, 44, 49, 50)	Supportive, but not usually the driving force in retention; often works through motivation and a common purpose.

	Positive performance	(3, 9, 10, 11, 14, 25, 31, 32, 34, 36, 37, 38, 42, 43)	
Empowerment	Competence	(10, 13, 14, 18, 19, 2, 40)	Important pathway of retention, but indirect, not directly tested as a driver of retention.
	Engagement	(10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 27, 34, 40)	
Vision building	Employee involvement	(15, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 34 40)	Least direct evidence for retention, but likely supports commitment through meaning.

The 50 selected articles were analyzed for the frequency of citation of each theme to identify the most influential themes related to employee retention. Figure 2 shows that individualized consideration was the first position with 44 articles (88%). The second most frequently reported theme was intellectual stimulation, at 37 articles (74%), followed by inspirational motivation, at 35 articles (70%). Idealized influence was present in 34 articles (68%) and empowerment was present in 21 articles (42%). Vision building was the least discussed topic, with only eight articles (16%) addressing it. The results indicate that the most studied theme in the literature reviewed was individualized consideration particularly in relation to employees' individual needs, commitment and career development.



Figure 4 Transformational leadership themes

To analyze the frequency of employee retention indicators, the fifteen papers were reviewed for the frequency of each indicator. Career development was the most reported indicator (25 articles, 50%), followed by encouragement (40%) and commitment and problem-solving (38% each), which were 5 and 12 percentage points lower respectively (see Figure 5). Role modeling and creativity were equally represented in the reporting with 18 articles (36%) reporting on each and trust and respect was reported on in 16 articles (32%). The variation in these

indicators suggests that the literature reviewed was comparatively more focused on career development whereas leadership related behaviors such as role modeling, trust and respect were reported less frequently. There were an equal number of articles reporting positive performance and engagement (14; 28%). The least reported indicators were employee involvement (16 %) and competence (14 %). The highest and lowest frequency differed by 36%. This indicates a large difference in the attention given to the individual indicators. Career development was the most prominent indicator in the literature reviewed, whereas competence and employee involvement were less covered.

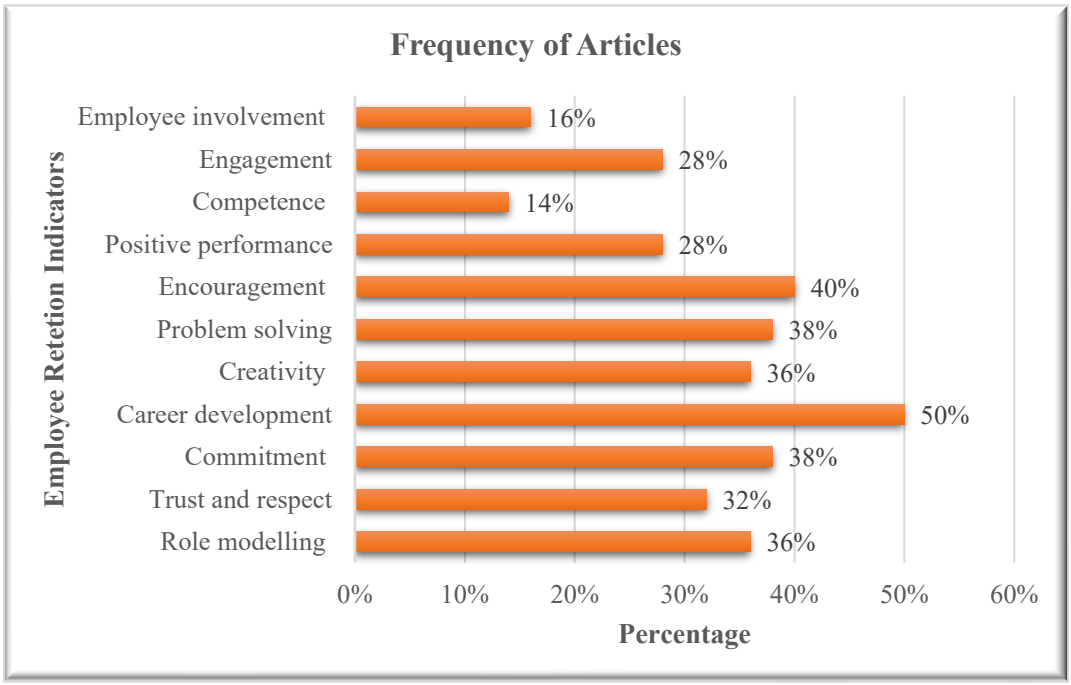


Figure 5 Paper frequency for employee retention indicators

Indicators' No of Citations Comparison across Transformational Leadership Themes

Cochran's Q test was used to compare the frequency of employee retention indicators across the transformational leadership themes and the results are shown in Table 7. The results show that there were statistically significant differences in the frequency of indicators for idealized influence ($p = .003$), individualized consideration ($p < .001$), intellectual stimulation ($p < .001$), inspirational motivation ($p = .002$), and empowerment ($p = .023$). For vision building, the value reported was at the conventional level of significance ($p = .050$). The reported indicators are reported with different frequencies for the different themes; however, the test results should be seen in relation to the indicators compared within each theme. The most common individual indicator was career development and was reported in 25 articles (50%) followed by encouragement in 20 articles (40%). In comparison, competence was reported in seven articles (14%), the least reported indicator in the table. Overall, the results emphasize the relative importance of career development and individualized consideration in the literature of transformational leadership and employee retention in the public sector.

Table 6

Themes' No of Citations Comparison in articles related to Transformational Leadership Themes

Theme	Indicator	No of Citation	Total (%)	p-value
Idealized influence	Role modelling	18	34 (68%)	.003
	Trust and respect	16		
Individualized consideration	Commitment	19	44 (88%)	< .001
	Career development	25		
Intellectual stimulation	Creativity	18	37 (74%)	< .001
	Problem solving	19		
Inspirational motivation	Encouragement	20	34 (68%)	.002
	Positive performance	14		
Empowerment	Competence	7	21 (42%)	.023
	Engagement	14		
Vision building	Employee involvement	8	8 16%	.050

Figure 6 shows the distribution of articles that reported each indicator, separated into articles that reported an indicator and articles that did not. The results reveal that the frequency of the indicators varies within the six themes. The most paid attention theme in the reviewed literature is individualized consideration. This theme was present in 44 articles (88%), followed by intellectual stimulation in 37 articles (74%). Of the articles, 34 (68%) contained idealized influence and inspirational motivation and 21 (42%) contained empowerment. Table 4 shows the theme of vision building with employee involvement had the highest frequency with eight articles (16%).

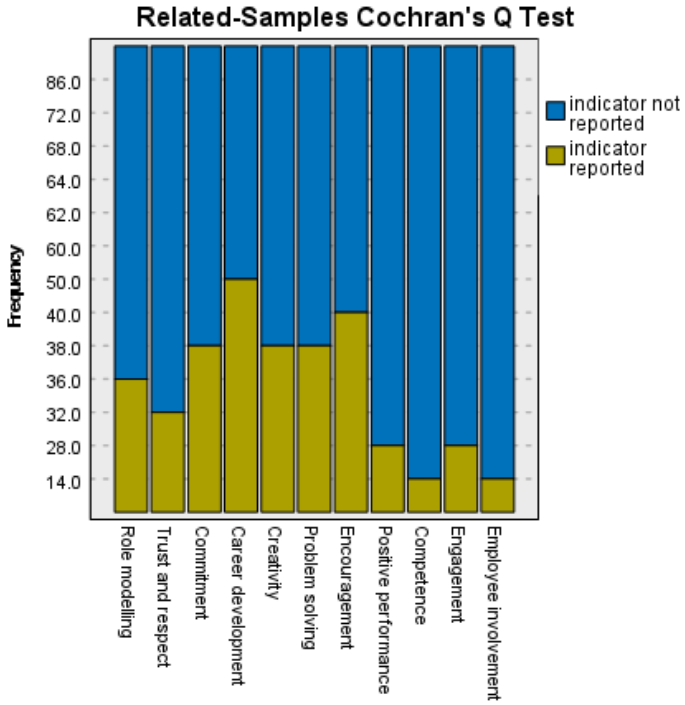


Figure 6 Frequency of reported and not-reported indicators across the included articles

Discussion

The aim of such comprehensive review is to examine how transformational leadership harbingers are used in literature to promote employee retention in public sector. However, the distribution of the reviewed evidence indicates an uneven emphasis across these harbingers. The high profile of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation indicates that the literature pays much attention to the leaders' response to employees' professional needs and their encouragement to contribute to challenges in the workplace. In contrast, building vision and empowerment is paid less attention, suggesting that the discussion on transformational leadership and retention is more developed around the immediate working relationships of employees than their involvement in influencing and directing the organization. This distinction is important because the frequency of a theme in the reviewed articles represents its prevalence in the literature and not the magnitude of its effect on retention.

The potential for individual consideration is particularly striking when we consider the public sector where the experiences of workers are subject to formal organizational arrangements and existing administrative arrangements. This aspect is very well represented in the reviewed literature. This means that the support of the employees for their professional development and the relationship of the employees with the supervisors are usually studied together with the retention of the employees. Moreover, these relationships are of interest to study in public hospitals, universities, schools and government organizations (Alasiry & Alkhaldi, 2024; Al-Rabiey, Al-Ghaili, Algomaie, & Ghanem, 2024; Aljanahi, Aljanahi, & Alzarouni, 2023; Diko & Saxena, 2023). The pattern of review, however, should not be taken to imply that individual consideration is necessarily the most important dimension of

transformational leadership. The frequency results show that it is the most studied dimension, but they do not clarify whether it is more related to retention than the other dimensions. This distinction allows us to distinguish the rate of a concept in the literature and evidence of comparative effectiveness.

In addition, the discussion on intellectual stimulation, ideal influence and inspirational motivation reveals that the literature views employee retention from relational and work-related aspects of leadership. Leadership is experienced by employees through trust in the leader's behavior, incentives to participate and opportunities to face work challenges with a positive attitude. They are not entirely separate ideas but overlap. Trust may influence the willingness of employees to contribute, and opportunities and encouragement for problem solving may influence the experience of employees in their roles. The reviewed studies include different areas of public sector, such as the research of (Rodrigues, et al., 2025; Vu, et al., 2025; Dias, et al., 2022; Oh & Chhinzer, 2021). Given the broad scope of the construct, transformational leadership should be studied across a variety of organizational settings. But this simple bibliographical diversity of studies does not demonstrate that the same leadership harbingers are used in the same way in different contexts. Employee responsibilities and organizational expectations vary and institutional arrangements need to be considered in interpreting evidence from different public organizations.

Besides, the relatively low representation of empowerment and vision building further qualifies the overall pattern. The fact that these dimensions are less visible in the literature reviewed does not mean that they are less relevant to employee retention, but it does suggest that they are limited in their coverage. Specifically, the limited attention to employee involvement in organizational vision leaves the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' participation in organizational direction less clearly represented than the relationship with individual support and development. Results of Cochran's Q showed statistically significant differences in the representation of indicators within idealized influence ($p=.003$), individualized consideration ($p<.001$), intellectual stimulation ($p<.001$), inspirational motivation ($p=.002$), and empowerment ($p=.023$). Vision building approached the conventional threshold ($p=.050$), which requires cautious interpretation. These results point to differences in the way that indicators are represented across the respective themes. They do not provide a measure of the strength of the relation between each theme and retention or causal effects. In sum, the evidence suggests that the research focus on the dimensions of transformational leadership is somewhat uneven. It is important to distinguish between what the literature most frequently discusses and what the available evidence conclusively establishes as regards employee retention.

Future Research Directions And Research Gap

This review identifies the major aspects through which transformational leadership has been explored on employee retention in the public sector but some gaps in literature are still there. Individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation seem to have received a considerable amount of attention while empowerment and vision building seem to be less represented. This imbalance indicates the need for a wider analysis of the association of transformational leadership with retention beyond the immediate supervisor relationships of employees, especially when considering empowerment and participation in the organizational vision. Another is measuring retention of employees. The themes discussed

include indicators such as commitment, engagement, career development and positive performance that are relevant to employees' workplace experiences but should not be equated to retention itself. Future research could distinguish between employees' intention to stay and actual staying, which would aid in gaining a better understanding of the relationship between transformational leadership and different retention outcomes. The literature reviewed covers a range of public sector contexts and geographical locations including government organizations, healthcare institutions and public educational institutions. However, the evidence presented in this review does not demonstrate the stability of the associations identified between these settings. Thus, comparative studies may explore the impact of institutional characteristics and organizational conditions on the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention. Further work should also consider the extent to which findings from specific public sector contexts can be generalized to other contexts rather than assuming the same leadership practices will have equivalent implications for organizations.

Constraint

Some limitations of this review are considered. First, although 50 articles were used, this collection may not reflect the whole body of research concerning transformational leadership and employee retention in the public sector. The results of this review should thus be interpreted according to the studies that were included and not as a complete representation of the entire body of evidence available. Second, the included articles differ in terms of research designs, measurement instruments, statistical techniques and organizational settings. This difference in methodology limits the extent to which their findings can be directly compared. Third, the classification of leadership themes and indicators relied on the information reported in the selected articles. Differences in terminology and operational definitions may have affected the classification of evidence. Finally, the frequency counts and Cochran's Q findings describe the prevalence of indicators in the literature reviewed, but do not, per se, establish the magnitude, direction, or causal impact of each leadership dimension on employee retention. Limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of the review.

Conclusions

This systematic literature review synthesized evidence from 50 articles investigating the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention in the public sector. The findings were categorized into six themes, namely idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, empowerment and vision building, reflected through eleven indicators. The theme most often represented was individualized consideration (44 articles), followed by intellectual stimulation (37). Idealized influence and inspirational motivation were present in 34 articles each, empowerment was present in 21 articles, and vision building was present in eight articles. This distribution indicates a greater emphasis on employee development, supportive leadership relationships, and work-related motivation than on empowerment and participation in the organizational vision. The Cochran's Q results also showed differences in representation of the indicators in the examined themes, although these findings should not be interpreted as evidence of comparative effectiveness. All in all, the review gives a structured account of the exploration of transformational leadership and employee retention

in public-sector research, while separating the visibility of certain concepts in the literature from the strength of evidence about their relationship to retention.

Statement Of Conflict Of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publications of this paper.

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