

Transformational Leadership and Employee Retention among HR Professionals in the Telecommunication Sector: The Mediating Role of Burnout and Emotional Exhaustion

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Abstract

Transformational leaders are often associated with positive outcomes at work, such as increased employee retention and motivation. However, this efficacy is also vital in stressful situations, such as those in the telecommunications sector, where the emotional state of the worker and their ability to respond to the escalating workload are crucial. This research study examines the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention among senior HR professionals in telecommunication organisations in Islamabad, with a special focus on the mediating effects of burnout and emotional exhaustion. The study is cross-sectional and quantitative, and the data was calculated on the basis of a structured survey, which was administered through a questionnaire to 215 senior HR professionals. The research proposes that organisations cannot stop at discrete explanations of pressure, but must turn to global cultural issues related to overburdened workloads and the latest trend of ‘always-on’ culture. Leadership development plus structural change has to be encouraged to foster a sense of psychological sustainability and long-term participation.

Keywords

Transformational leadership
Employee burnout
Emotional exhaustion
Employee retention
Telecommunication industry
Leadership theory

1. Introduction

1.1. Study background

Pakistan's telecommunication sector is a dynamic industry in which technological change is rapid and market competition is very stiff, which puts the workforce under great pressure and makes it very difficult to enable alignment between leadership practices and employee sustainability. According to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (2023), telecommunication companies are facing a growing challenge in retaining experienced employees, particularly in strategic positions. Since employee retention plays a vital role in determining the effectiveness of organisations, leadership practices have become an area of interest. Transformational leadership, which has been associated with motivating people through vision, personal attention and intellectual stimulation, has resulted in increased employee satisfaction and commitment (Bass & Riggio, 2006). It may be considered highly crucial in forming a good working culture, especially during periods of change. However, recent research suggests that the impact of transformational leadership could vary according to circumstances (Rudolph et al., 2022). Even though there has been research on the issue of transformational leadership, aspects such as the exhausting, emotionally demanding character of the leadership have not been analysed to a high degree among senior human resource (HR) professionals.

Many prevailing studies focus on the effects of leadership on workers as a whole, overlooking those individuals who directly experience and implement policies. The study focuses on senior HR professionals working in telecommunication firms, a segment that is not often mentioned in retention studies. The professional perspective offered by these professionals enables them to provide an exclusive view of the relationship between leadership style and workforce sustainability. The research will give more of an overview of the role played by transformational leadership in retention in high-demand organisations, since burnout and emotional exhaustion are deliberated as potential mediators of this relationship.

1.2. Research objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To discover the association between transformational leadership and employee retention.
- To analyse whether burnout plays a mediating role in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention.
- To investigate whether emotional exhaustion functions as a mediator between transformational leadership and employee retention.
- To provide practical insights for telecommunication firms on crafting leadership policies that balance performance prospects with employee wellbeing to increase retention.

1.3. Research questions

- **RQ1:** Does transformational leadership affect employee retention among senior HR professionals in the telecommunication sector?
- **RQ2:** Does employee burnout mediate the association between transformational leadership and employee retention?
- **RQ3:** Does emotional exhaustion mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention?

- **RQ4:** Do organisational factors such as workload and leadership expectations contribute to employee burnout and emotional exhaustion?
- **RQ5:** Do leadership strategies concentrated on employee wellbeing improve retention outcomes in the telecommunication sector?

1.4. Research significance

This paper adds to the growing literature on transformational leadership by focusing on how this leadership style prevents employee turnover in the telecommunication industry. The study focused on senior HR staff, a group that is frequently involved in learning and mastering leadership practices. Their view is of great benefit in understanding how leadership can promote employee dedication and retention. The importance of these research findings to telecommunication organisations, with the purpose of improving stability in the workforce, cannot be overemphasised. When organisations are aware of what encourages retention, including the leadership styles and experiences of the staff members, their HR strategies can be improved. The investigation also offers advice on the set-up of leadership-development programmes, which can contribute to long-term employee-engagement strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical foundation

The study is grounded in the leader–member exchange (LMX) theory, which suggests that leaders establish one-on-one relationships with followers, depending on the levels of trust, respect and responsibility exchanged between them (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). LMX theory has been found to play a vital part in improving organisational results under modern workplace conditions. According to a recent study by Bennouna et al. (2024), the transformational approach to leadership styles, which helps motivate and inspire employees, sheds light on their issues and is likely to lead to an increase in quality LMX relationship development. Such exchanges lower the risk of burnout and fatigue brought forth by emotions by building on relationships, trust and employee appreciation. Such a transformation of leadership behaviours assists not only in terms of performance outcomes but also in emotional resilience and staff retention. Therefore, it can be concluded that in the LMX framework, transformational leadership not only enhances performance but also leads to a reduced level of emotional strain and increased employee retention in the predominantly challenging area of telecommunications. In the telecommunication industry, where individuals working in the HR department tend to experience heavy workloads, fast technological shifts and unrelenting demands on performance, the quality of the leader–member relationship is paramount.

LMX relationships of high quality are also capable of relieving the emotional burden that is dominant in this fast-paced industry. Transformational leaders who work within an LMX model can not only work to improve the wellbeing of an individual but can also work to improve the stability of an organisation by enhancing retention. Because different emotional resources are maintained, this theoretical school of thought guides the research questions to organise the study to understand how the transformational leadership behaviour has a mediating effect on burnout and emotional exhaustion, which ultimately affect employee retention among HR professionals in the telecommunication industry.

2.2. Transformational leadership

The positive effects of transformational leadership on employee motivation, satisfaction and commitment are well known. Transformational leadership is based on four main behaviours: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration (Shukri & Noor, 2024). Through these, leaders can match individual goals with the organisation's purpose (Gupta, 2025). As stated by Agazu et al. (2025), notably, transformational leadership also has a moral and ethical aspect, where leaders behave in an honourable way and they raise followers. Through shared values, such behaviours are directly related to positive employee behaviour, the rise in job satisfaction, a greater sense of organisational commitment, and lower turnover intention. Transformational leadership is most significant in situations of high stress such as telecommunication, where change and the necessity of having to execute it is ever-accelerating. Leadership is crucial in such environments to ensure stability, motivation and retention of employees (Waseem et al. 2025).

2.3. Transformational leadership and employee retention

Transformational leadership has received much attention in organisational behaviour and HR management because of its profound impact on employee retention (Febrian et al., 2023), inspiring, motivating and fostering employee commitment. Because retaining top talent is increasingly challenging, scholars have extensively studied the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention (Umair et al., 2024). Leaders with the aforementioned attributes of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration (Shukri & Noor, 2024) develop an atmosphere in which trust, motivation and engagement are experienced by employees. Idealised influence refers to a situation in which leaders act as role models and are able to display the right kind of conduct to win the respect and admiration of the employees (Gachira & Ntara, 2024). According to Oyewobi (2024), transformational leadership is known to produce a strong surge of job satisfaction, which in turn can boost organisational commitment and lower turnover intentions. If employees feel their leaders are supportive and inspirational, they are likely to stay longer in the organisation. Transformational leaders also create an environment in which an employee feels motivated and encouraged at work (Bakker et al., 2023). Transformational leaders were also discovered to be a moral and ethics-based source of integrity and common values (Alwali & Alwali, 2025). Transformational leaders have also contributed towards job satisfaction, creating affective commitment, which reduces turnover intentions (Choi et al., 2025). Through high-quality leader-member exchanges, transformational leadership strengthens employee trust and loyalty, which is especially important in the telecommunication sector (Hasib et al., 2020). In the light of LMX theory, transformational leadership has qualities of generating only high-quality relationships between leaders and subordinates, where subordinates receive social and emotional support, which eliminates burnout probabilities and emotional exhaustion (Sharif et al., 2024).

2.4. Burnout, transformational leadership and employee retention

Burnout is a mental condition caused when people are exposed to persistent job stress, and can be described as emotional exhaustion, cynicism and the lack of personal effectiveness (Channawar, 2023). This has adversely impacted individual and organisational performance, resulting in lower job satisfaction, productivity and commitment, and higher absenteeism and turnover intentions (Jogi et al., 2025). Some of the factors that usually lead to burnout include high workload, low control of the work, and insufficiency of a supervisor or teammates (Nápoles, 2022). Transformational leadership is important in avoiding burnout, given that it creates trust-based, emotionally supportive

relationships, which are at the core of the theory of LMX. Positive traits and continuous interaction between a leader and members of their organisation, which connote candid communication, personal recognition and emotional stability, help to shield employees from the negative effects of stress load and psychological pressure (Payne, 2024). Once the transformational leaders express their concern about the workers by involving them in the two-dimensional decision-making process, the risk of emotional exhaustion is minimised (Cheng et al., 2023). A worker is more likely to show commitment to the organisation when they are appreciated and are given opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes. Despite this, employees generally strive to prevent burnout. Thus, high-quality LMX can help raise the wellbeing and retention of employees because transformational leaders are strong (Petrilli et al., 2024).

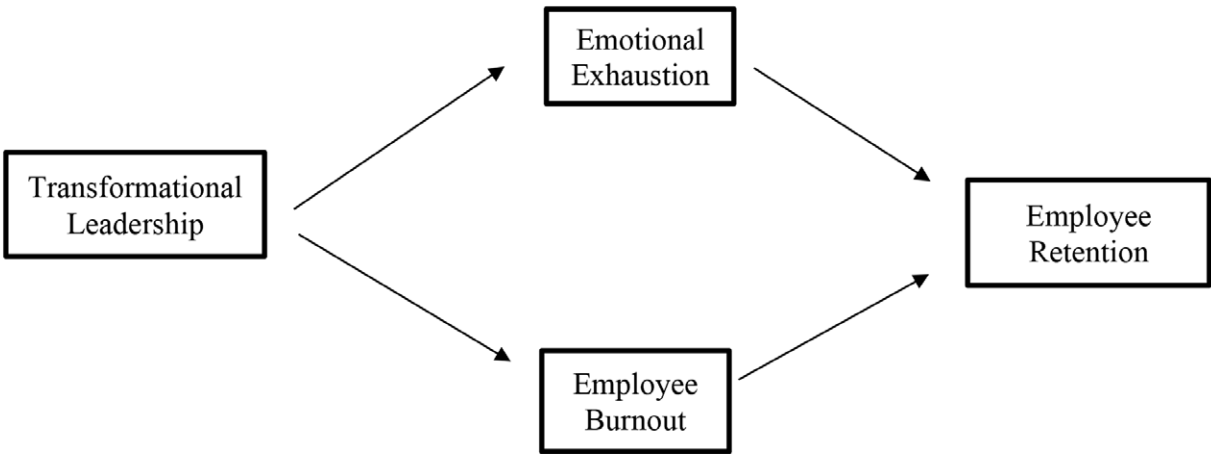
2.5. Emotional exhaustion, transformational leadership and employee retention

Transformational leadership, involving visionary leadership, individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation, has been generally acknowledged to enhance employees’ levels of engagement, job satisfaction and retention (Khan et al., 2022). Emotional exhaustion is the depletion of emotions and the psyche, which occurs under the influence of intensive interpersonal and organisational stress (Ahmed et al., 2024). Emotional exhaustion compromises the working activity of personnel and causes retreat, impairment of welfare and the emergence of a desire to leave the workplace (Shinde, 2025).

Transformational leadership can help avoid emotional exhaustion through the creation of confidence, emotional support and a sense of purpose (Geremias et al., 2024). Transformational leaders can improve employees’ morale, as they make them feel a valued and integral part of the firm (Shatila et al., 2024). Premru et al. (2023) believe that high-quality leader–member relationships (that is, relationships that are based on equality and care) can be viewed as an emotional asset protecting against fatigue. In a case where such healthy exchanges exist, the emotional load is minimised, meaning employees are more likely to stay. Conversely, emotional exhaustion mediates the influence of transformational leadership on retention, especially in high-pressure sectors, including telecommunication.

2.6. Theoretical framework

Based on the literature review, the following is the proposed theoretical framework.



2.7. Hypotheses

- **H1:** Transformational leadership is positively associated with employee retention.
- **H2:** Transformational leadership is negatively associated with employee burnout.
- **H3:** Transformational leadership is negatively associated with emotional exhaustion.
- **H4:** Employee burnout is negatively associated with employee retention.
- **H5:** Emotional exhaustion is negatively associated with employee retention.
- **H6:** Employee burnout mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention.
- **H7:** Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research design

3.1.1. *Research philosophy*

The study assimilates the positivist research philosophy. This is a school of thought that considers that knowledge follows scientific observation and reasoning. The approach stresses facts that can be verified and follows a logical approach to create information (Karupiah, 2022). Positivism emphasises hypothesis testing, quantifiable observations and statistical analysis (Irshaidat, 2022).

3.1.2. *Research approach*

This study embraced a deductive research approach, which involves formulating hypotheses based on established theories and testing them. Theories are tested using deductive reasoning, which goes from the general to the specific (Casula et al., 2021). Deduction is usually used by positivists, and is appropriate for research that uses robust past frameworks and either validates or refutes recognised notions (Mbanaso et al., 2023).

3.1.3. *Research methodology*

The research adopted a quantitative methodology. Quantitative research allows researchers to test hypotheses, measure variable relationships, and generalise findings across populations (Mulisa, 2022). For this purpose, structured questionnaires were used to collect data from the target population. Pilot testing was carried out with a sample size of at least 30 respondents to assess the transparency, consistency and reliability of the instruments (In, 2017). Moreover, the data collected by these questionnaires was further analysed through SPSS software.

3.1.4. *Research strategy*

A survey-based research strategy was applied to enable efficient data collection from the large sample in a limited time-frame. The survey was carried out using systematic questionnaires, which give the researchers the power to collect and interpret numerical data by asking a series of predetermined questions of the subjects or respondents (Kittur, 2023).

3.1.5. *Time horizon*

This research was carried out under certain time and budget constraints, so a cross-sectional time horizon approach was used. This approach captured the current views and experiences of em-

ployees at a single point in time, making it possible to identify connections among the variables (Wang & Cheng, 2020).

3.2. Sampling design

3.2.1. Target population

The data was collected from senior HR professionals (HR managers, consultants and specialists) employed in telecommunication companies operating in Islamabad. They were selected on the basis that they are carriers and bearers of leadership practices. Their strategic positioning and participation in HR operations, plus intimate contact with leadership systems, provide incisive perspectives on transformational leadership, and its impact on emotional outcomes and employee sustainability.

3.2.2. Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis is individual senior HR professionals. This decision corresponds to the focus of the study, which dwells on the role of examining the leadership behaviour and emotional results at the individual level.

3.2.3. Sample size

The sample was 215 senior HR professionals. This is according to the recommendations of Guilford (1954) that a sample size of 200+ is sufficient and acceptable to make a statistical analysis of a survey. To achieve diversity in the firms used and to reduce the possibility of institutional bias, the sample was drawn from the five major telecommunication service providers in Islamabad.

3.2.4. Sampling technique

The simple random sampling process was employed to offer every member of the target population (senior HR professionals) an equivalent probability of selection. Such a probability-based measure strengthens the objectivity and generalisability of the results in the stated HR domain.

3.3. Measurement of variables

Data was collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire with closed-ended questions developed on already-established scales. The study measured all variables on a structured scale with items that used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) as a response scale. Transformational leadership was the independent variable, as measured by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) created by Bass and Avolio (1996), and comprised of the following dimensions: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. Employee retention as a dependent variable was achieved on a modified scale as stated by Tian et al. (2020), where emphasis was on intention to remain, job satisfaction and job commitment. Burnout and emotional exhaustion proved to be reliable; the reliability of all of the measurements was checked by using an initial pilot study.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The survey was conducted among 215 senior HR personnel employed in various established telecommunication organisations across Islamabad. This selection of the sample was especially made around the senior HR professionals, as they also have a very specific and unique role in the leadership processes within an organisation. This has already been mentioned earlier in the

methodology section to ensure transparency, as well as to guarantee that any other concerns that might arise regarding the possibility of misrepresenting participants are sufficiently covered.

4.1. Descriptive analysis

4.1.1. Gender demographics

Table 1. Gender demographics of the survey respondents.

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
Male	133	61.9%	1.38	0.49
Female	82	38.1%		
Total	215	100%		

Source: Authors’ own creation.

Out of 215 respondents, a majority (62%) of respondents were male and 38% were female. The gender mix sheds light on the fact that female employees are dominated by their male counterparts in the pool of senior HR professionals in the telecommunication industry of Islamabad, Pakistan. The male dominance is further defined in the mean gender value of 1.38. However, having 38% female representation shows that there is an ongoing effort to make the top leadership accommodating as far as gender diversity is concerned.

4.1.2. Age-group distribution

Table 2. Age-group distribution of the survey respondents.

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
18–30 years	50	23.3%	2.18	1.01
31–40 years	97	45.1%		
41–50 years	58	27.0%		
51+ years	10	4.7%		
Total	215	100%		

Source: Authors’ own creation.

The age distribution of respondents indicates that the majority of the senior HR professionals are aged 31–40 years (45.1%) and 41–50 years (27%). In particular, the age group of 31–40 years comprises 97 respondents (45.1%), and the age group of 41–50 years comprises 58 respondents (27%). The standard deviation of 1.01 and the mean age-group value of 2.18 indicate that there is a concentration in these two middle categories. Such distribution demonstrates a well-developed and experienced HR staff, which conforms to the character of HR senior positions, as they often involve a significant amount of experience and organisational wisdom. The sample consisted of only 23.3% of respondents 18–30 years of age, and 4.7% of respondents aged 51 years and older.

4.1.3. Years of experience

Table 3. Years of experience of the survey respondents.

Years of Experience	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
1–5 years	50	23.3%	2.14	1.04
6–10 years	97	45.1%		
11–15 years	50	23.3%		
16+ years	18	8.4%		
Total	215	100%		

Source: Authors’ own creation.

Distribution reveals that almost half of the respondents are mid-career professionals with 6–10 years of experience. This serves as a sign of a workforce that is most likely subject to diversity of leadership styles, and might offer implications about the impact working with transformational leadership styles has on retention.

4.1.4. Educational level

Table 4. Educational level of survey respondents.

Educational Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
Bachelor’s degree	65	30.2%	1.49	0.62
Master’s degree	145	67.4%		
Doctorate	5	2.3%		
Total	215	100%		

Source: Authors’ own creation.

The sample reveals high education levels, with 67% of the respondents holding a master’s degree, which could suggest the workforce has been well educated and trained with analytical skills to work out critical leadership practices. This would align with the specialised knowledge requirements of the telecommunication sector. The proportion of respondents holding a bachelor’s degree is 30%, while 2% hold a doctorate; hence, the sample is very well qualified. The mean of 1.49 suggests a strong educational foundation among respondents.

4.1.5. Organisational role

Table 5. Survey respondents’ roles within their organisations.

Organisational Role	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
HR Managers	85	39.5%
HR Specialists	60	27.9%
Senior HR Executives	45	20.9%
HR Consultants/Advisors	25	11.6%
Total	215	100%

Source: Authors’ own creation.

The distribution of roles in the organisations indicates that the sample is mainly composed of HR managers (39.50%), followed by HR specialists (27.9%), senior HR executives (20.9%) and HR consultants/advisors (11.60%). Such a tendency towards the input of senior HR professionals is an indication of the particularity of the study, which attempts to explore the issue of transformational leadership and employee retention using the perspectives of individuals who are no strangers to these issues, undertaking the central task of leadership formulation, implementation, and designing items of HR policy.

4.2. Correlation analysis

The variables used in this study were subject to correlation analysis. Apart from the mean, correlation analysis was used to find the extent of the relationship between two variables. The correlation coefficient is usually given as *r*, which varies between -1 and +1: between -1 and 0 implies a negative correlation, between 0 and +1 implies a positive correlation, and *r* = 0 implies no correlation at all.

Table 6. Correlation matrix.

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Transformational leadership	1.00			
2. Employee burnout	-0.45**	1.00		
3. Emotional exhaustion	-0.40**	0.75**	1.00	
4. Employee retention	0.68**	-0.50**	-0.60**	1.00

** Denotes statistical significance at *p* < 0.01
Source: Authors' own creation.

Correlation analysis revealed that the respondents (senior HR professionals working in large telecommunication firms in Islamabad) provided statistically significant correlations between the variables of the study. Respondent opinions demonstrated a close positive correlation between how transformational leadership was perceived, i.e., there was close positive correlation between perceived transformational leadership and employee retention intentions (*r* = 0.68, *p* < 0.01), such that in the sample of cases, the higher the rating of transformational leadership behaviours, the higher the self-reported intentions to stay with the organisation. Transformational leadership showed moderate negative correlations towards employee burnout (*r* = -0.45, *p* < 0.01) and emotional exhaustion (*r* = -0.40, *p* < 0.01), meaning that the higher the professionals rated the behaviours of transformational leadership, the lower their markings were towards burnout and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, employee burnout and emotional exhaustion, as perceived by the respondents, was generally negatively correlated with employee retention intentions (*r* = -0.50, *p* < 0.01 and *r* = -0.60, *p* < 0.01, respectively); thus, it can be surmised that increased stress in the workplace may be related to low chances of retaining the employee in the company. The theoretical expectations in the perception of the relationship between burnout and emotional exhaustion (*r* = 0.75, *p* < 0.01) were also confirmed by a strong positive correlation.

4.3. Regression analysis results

Regression analysis was used to determine the predictors of employee retention in the context of transformational leadership, burnout and emotional exhaustion.

Table 7. Multiple regression analysis on employee retention.

Predictor	B	β	T	p
(Constant)	2.10	—	4.20	.000
Transformational leadership	0.45	0.38	6.21	.000
Employee burnout	-0.32	-0.26	-4.25	.000
Emotional exhaustion	-0.40	-0.35	-5.15	.000

Source: Authors’ own creation.

The model was found to be statistically significant, since $R^2 = 0.72$ denotes that the collective influences of transformational leadership, employee burnout and emotional exhaustion could describe the variance targeted at the intended employee retention attributes of at least 72% within this sample. More precisely, perceived transformational leadership is positively linked to employee retention intentions (0.38, $p < 0.01$), which implies that the greater the rating of the transformational leadership behaviours, the greater the stated intentions to remain. Conversely, negative relationships were found between employee burnout (0.26, $p < 0.01$) and emotional exhaustion (0.35, $p < 0.01$) and retention intentions; i.e., both burnout and emotional exhaustion were associated with higher intentions to leave the organisation.

4.4. Reliability analysis results

Table 8. Reliability analysis of key variables.

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha (α)
Transformational leadership	0.87
Employee burnout	0.82
Emotional exhaustion	0.85
Employee retention	0.79

Source: Authors’ own creation.

The reliability analysis showed that all the measurement scales used in this research had a high internal consistency, with Cronbach’s Alpha ranging between 0.79 and 0.87. Of these, the transformational leadership scale had the greatest reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 0.87$), showing good consistency of answers given by senior HR professionals. The employee burnout scale scored 0.82 reliability, but emotional exhaustion showed the highest reliability, 0.85. A Cronbach’s Alpha score of 0.79 was achieved by the employee retention scale, though this still falls within the acceptable range of research studies. These findings affirm the consistency of the measures used in this research and their ability to reliably assess the perceptions of participants concerning leadership practices, employee wellbeing and retention intentions in the organisational setting.

4.5. Mediation analysis results

It was found in the mediated analysis that burnout is a moderately influential mediator in the association between transformational leadership and employee retention intentions, as is emotional exhaustion. The mediated effects of burnout and emotional exhaustion were also statistically significant, as the confidence intervals did not reach the value of zero. This indicates that transforma-

tional leadership is indirectly, as well as directly, related to employee retention intentions through negative correlation with burnout and emotional exhaustion. These results serve to explain how any of the mediators individually contribute to the correlation between transformational leadership and retention intentions among the respondents of a senior HR professionals sample.

Table 9. Mediation analysis.

Path	Coefficient	SE	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)
Direct effect (c')	0.45	0.08	0.32	0.58
Leadership → Burnout (a ₁)	-0.45	0.10	-0.65	-0.25
Burnout → Retention (b ₁)	-0.35	0.09	-0.53	-0.17
Indirect effect via burnout (a ₁ b ₁)	-0.16	0.06	-0.28	-0.07
Leadership → Emotional exhaustion (a ₁)	-0.40	0.09	-0.58	-0.22
Emotional exhaustion → Retention (b ₁)	-0.30	0.08	-0.46	-0.14
Indirect effect via emotional exhaustion	-0.12	0.05	-0.22	-0.05

Source: Authors' own creation.

5. Discussion

The study under consideration examined the relationship between transformational leadership and employee burnout, emotional exhaustion and employee retention in the intentions of senior HR professionals of large and well-established telecommunication organisations in Islamabad. The study aimed to find out both the direct effects and the indirect effects of transformational leadership on retention intentions, where the mediating factors were burnout and emotional exhaustion. The results indicate a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention intentions. This implies that when the senior HR professionals view their organisational leaders as being transformational by exhibiting such behaviours as articulate vision and individualised consideration, or are intellectually stimulating, they indicate a high desire to stay in the organisation. Additionally, transformational leadership is characterised not only by negative relations to employee burnout and emotional exhaustion; positive leadership behaviours can also help preserve employee wellbeing. Burnout and emotional exhaustion showed a large negative correlation with retention intentions, which were their effects on the cumulative intentions of employees to leave the organisation. This means that transformational leadership does not have a direct impact on retention intentions, but it may indirectly make a positive impact through the welfare of personnel. Burnout and emotional exhaustion had significant negative correlations with retention intentions, representing their cumulative impact on employees' intentions to leave the organisation. These findings match the available body of literature, but can make a particular contribution to the area of discussion because they focus on senior HR representatives in the telecommunication sector, which is typically lacking in the general literature on leadership.

Notably, these specifics of the sample character have to be taken into account when interpreting the results of the current study. Senior HR professionals tend to have more of a role to play when it comes to the application of leadership strategies and policies. Their experience is thus to some extent the most pertinent, but not to the extent of the staff in general working in the operation. The latter will be able to develop a more positive view of transformational leadership because of their access to the schemes of leadership and decision-making patterns. The research,

hence, takes into consideration views held by a highly active and powerful part of the labour force and not necessarily the whole range of every organisational level. These results have more than a few practical implications. Transformational leadership needs to be encouraged in this process of retention of talent in telecommunication companies. Although the leadership development may already be implemented in many large companies, it is also important to ensure that the levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion decrease through leadership behaviours. Some of the practices that are important include facilitating a healthy work–life balance, provision of manageable workloads, facilitation of feedback and support structures, and development of employee wellness programmes. These strategies should not only be channelled to operational employees but also to the top HR professionals, whose work has specific pressures, because their roles are very important regarding policy formulations and management of change in organisations. One should also mention the role of organisational culture. This paper affirms that the performance of leadership is not a factor that can be individually distinguished in the general cultural setting in which it is administered. These findings again state the fact that the performance of leadership is not an individual attribute of a person, but also lies in the heart of the organisational culture. Even the best transformational leadership practice in high-stress industries, such as telecommunication, where constant connectivity and working excessive hours is the norm, will make burnout worse unless combined with organisational cultural change that promotes recovery and rest, work–life flexibility and psychological safety. Companies need to make sure that a positive leadership practice is supported by systems that deter the overworking and stress-creating habits such as the demand for constant connectedness.

The combined efforts towards improvement of a leadership intervention targeting improved retention become even more effective when the organisational culture is targeted comprehensively, rather than just a leader's behaviour. Lastly, limitations of the study are its being cross-sectional, meaning that one cannot draw any causal conclusions based on the study. The relationships that are observed are the result of associations of a perception, and not the intention of retention but the actual behaviour of turnover. Longitudinal designs should be taken into account in the future so it can be observed whether there is any change over time, or not, to determine the outcomes of perceived transformational leadership. The study can also be extended to other categories of employees in telecommunication organisations, to give a better picture of how leadership influences retention at various levels of the organisation. Overall, this study contains evidence that transformational leadership is positively associated with retention intentions among senior HR professionals working in large telecommunication companies, both directly and indirectly; namely, through the correlation with less burnout and emotional exhaustion. These results further highlight the significance of leadership quality in retaining quality HR professionals, as long as organisations can incorporate leadership development with wide-scale cultural and wellbeing practices.

6. Limitations

Although the study has also gathered some positive data on the relationship between transformational leadership and burnout, and other factors such as emotional exhaustion and retention intentions of workers, there are also a number of limitations that need to be taken into account. To start with, the sample included only the senior HR officers of well-established and big telecommunication companies based in Islamabad. Though this sample was selected purposely based on their strategic importance in both leadership and retention processes, their opinions may not necessarily reflect those of the operational employees or other areas within the telecommunication industry. Second, self-reported data can be subject to abuse, such as social desirability bias and response bias, since

individuals can respond more positively with regard to leadership or may report fewer negative experiences in the workplace. A cross-sectional research design was applied, which paints a picture of the current perceptions. It does not allow characterising causal relations or defining the change of retention behaviour with time. And, lastly, although the participants were recruited within several telecommunication companies, neither number nor size of participating organisations were described, which can decrease the transparency and generalisability.

7. Future Research Directions

Future studies must consider addressing the above-presented limitations, and could increase the sample population by involving telecommunication company employees with various functional specialisations and hierarchies. This would help to increase researchers' understanding of the impact of transformational leadership on employee retention in the broader workforce. A longitudinal study that would monitor the consequences of leadership practice, burnout and emotional exhaustion on the real employee retention levels, and also some rigorous methodological precautions, is highly recommended. The organisations should also include objective indicators of burnout, e.g., physiological stress measures or 360-degree feedback by supervisors and peers, making data more reliable and free of sampling bias. Lastly, future research could examine possible moderators such as organisational culture, size of firms or generational variation, to help understand how such variables influence the effect of leadership on employee retention within high-stress industries such as the telecommunication industry.

Ethics Approval and Declarations

This study was conducted as an independent examination and has no formal affiliation to any academic or medical institution. The data was collected via personal and professional networks. All participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study and their confidentiality was ensured during the research. The authors also state that there are no conflicts of interest with regard to the study.

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