

The Role of Work Engagement Mediation in The Influence of Transformational Leadership and Job Satisfaction on Educated Generation Z Employees' Intentions to Stay in Their Jobs

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Abstract: This study investigates how educational-oriented leadership and job satisfaction influence educated Generation Z employees' intention to stay, with work engagement as a learning-mediated mechanism in the manufacturing sector. Framed within educational management and workplace learning, this research positions employee retention as an outcome of organizational learning processes rather than a purely administrative human resource function. A quantitative approach was applied using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Data were collected from 210 educated Generation Z employees at PT Pabrik Kertas Tjiwi Kimia Tbk through purposive sampling. The findings indicate that transformational leadership and job satisfaction significantly enhance work engagement, which in turn mediates employees' intention to stay. This study contributes novel insights by explicitly integrating educational leadership and workplace learning into retention research for educated Generation Z in manufacturing contexts. Practically, the results suggest that organizations fostering learning-oriented leadership, meaningful work experiences, and continuous development pathways are more likely to retain young employees. The study offers implications for educational leadership development, organizational learning design, and evidence-based retention policies in industrial settings.

Keywords: *Educational leadership, workplace learning, work engagement, intention to stay, Generation Z*

A. Introduction

In the era of globalization and digital disruption, the dynamics of the workforce have undergone significant changes with the entry of educated Generation Z into the world of work. This generation has distinctive characteristics, such as a desire for flexibility, meaning in work, and a balance between personal and professional life (Fotaleno & Batubara, 2024). According to Bencsik and Machova (2016), educated Generation Z was shaped by social and economic conditions that differed from previous generations, thereby influencing their mindset and work behavior. As a result, educated Generation Z tends to have a more individualistic career orientation and is less attached to organizations (Sekar Arum et al., 2023).

Education plays a strategic role in developing human resources who are adaptive, productive, and capable of responding to dynamic organizational challenges. In the context of higher education and professional development, education not only equips individuals with technical competencies but also shapes attitudes, values, and psychological readiness for long-term career engagement. Effective educational processes foster critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and work-related competencies that support employees' ability to adapt to organizational demands. For educated Generation Z, education is closely associated with opportunities for self-development, meaningful learning experiences, and continuous growth, which later influence their expectations toward leadership, job satisfaction, work engagement, and intention to stay within an organization.

Generation Z shows a high intention to change jobs when they feel undervalued or do not get development opportunities (Purnama Dewi & Indrawati, 2025). They expect an inclusive, appreciative work environment that provides space for creativity (Rimadhani, 2024), and they value work experience and continuous learning more than financial rewards alone (Afandi et al., 2022). This condition poses a major challenge for organizations in retaining the loyalty and commitment of Generation Z employees (Wibowo & Ayuningtyas, 2024).

In Indonesia, the low intention to stay among educated Generation Z is increasingly relevant given that young workers make up 44.77% of the total national workforce (Central Statistics Agency, 2020). Surveys show that the main reasons Generation Z leaves their jobs are not only related to salary, but also influenced by better job offers, lack of support, and an uncomfortable work environment (Jakpat, 2022; Goodstats, 2022). These conditions have the potential to disrupt organizational stability and business sustainability if not managed properly (Talker Research, 2025).

The similar problem occurred at PT Pabrik Kertas Tjiwi Kimia Tbk., Paper Factory 2 Division, which experienced an increase in Generation Z employee turnover in the last three years. Many young employees resign within less than two years of employment due to a lack of appreciation from their superiors, high workloads, and a work environment that does not support work-life balance. Although the company has improved its compensation system and work facilities, the level of satisfaction and engagement among educated Generation Z employees remains relatively low, resulting in decreased efficiency and increased workloads for the remaining employees.

Transformational leadership is seen as one strategic approach to increase intention to stay. Bloxsome et al. (2019) state that transformational leaders are able to inspire and increase employee confidence through strong vision and motivation. The emotional connection built between superiors and subordinates has also been proven to increase employee commitment and loyalty (Lai et al., 2020). In addition, transformational leadership encourages the creation of a supportive and innovative work environment (Senbursa, 2023), as well as open communication and a sense of belonging that is greatly needed by Generation Z (Chua & Ayoko, 2021).

Apart from leadership, job satisfaction plays an important role in employees' decisions to stay. Job satisfaction arises when employees feel that their work is meaningful and in line with their personal expectations (Rai & Maheshwari, 2021). This satisfaction is not only

influenced by compensation, but also by recognition, development opportunities, and work-life balance (Boštjančič & Petrovčič, 2019). Previous research shows that job satisfaction is positively correlated with intention to stay and employee loyalty (Sapar & Oducado, 2021; Thokoa et al., 2021).

However, transformational leadership and job satisfaction do not always directly increase intention to stay without strong work engagement. Work engagement is a positive psychological state characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, and absorption in work (Nemțeanu et al., 2022). Organizational support and role clarity have been shown to increase work engagement, which impacts employee performance and loyalty (Monje-Amor et al., 2020). Generation Z shows higher commitment when they feel emotionally involved and have meaningful work goals (Gautam & Enslin, 2019). In fact, work engagement can strengthen the influence of transformational leadership and job satisfaction on intention to stay (Vacalares & Chavez, 2024).

Intention to stay reflects employees' desire to remain working in an organization and is greatly influenced by job satisfaction, interpersonal relationships, career development, and work-life balance (Judeh & Abou-Moghli, 2019; Bellamkonda & Pattusamy, 2024). Generation Z tends to stay with organizations that offer meaningful work, flexibility, and supportive leadership (Bergman & Nordström, 2022).

Education has expanded beyond formal schooling into organizational contexts where learning, development, and leadership shape workforce sustainability. In contemporary organizations, leadership functions as an educational agent that cultivates learning climates, supports competence development, and facilitates meaningful work experiences. This educational perspective is particularly salient for Generation Z, whose work expectations emphasize continuous learning, feedback, and personal growth.

From an educational management viewpoint, transformational leadership promotes workplace learning by encouraging reflection, coaching, and empowerment. When leadership practices support learning and development, employees experience higher job satisfaction, which strengthens work engagement a construct closely associated with experiential learning and psychological investment. Prior research confirms links among leadership, satisfaction, engagement, and retention; however, most studies conceptualize retention as a managerial outcome rather than a learning-driven process.

Despite extensive HR research, limited studies explicitly frame employee retention as an educational phenomenon especially for Generation Z in manufacturing contexts where routine tasks can suppress engagement. This study advances the literature by (1) positioning work engagement as a learning-mediated mechanism, (2) emphasizing educational leadership as a driver of retention, and (3) providing contextual evidence from a manufacturing setting. This educational framing differentiates the study from prior HR-centric approaches.

Based on this research gap, this study is novel in that it focuses on the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction on the intention to stay of Generation Z employees in the paper manufacturing sector, particularly at PT Pabrik Kertas Tjiwi Kimia Tbk. This research is expected to

broaden the theoretical understanding of the psychological mechanisms that influence Generation Z's intention to stay and provide practical implications for organizations in designing more effective young workforce retention strategies.

B. Methods

This section describes in detail the instruments, procedures, surveys, questionnaires, and other tools employed in the research. The author should clearly state the research design, whether the study is experimental, a literature review, simulation-based, or survey-oriented. All software and hardware utilized during the research process should be specified, including their respective brands. In addition, the research conditions, underlying assumptions, and theoretical frameworks adopted must be thoroughly explained. The description should be sufficiently clear and systematic to allow other researchers to replicate the study under comparable circumstances.

This study is a quantitative study that uses numerical data and is analyzed using statistical methods to test hypotheses. This study aims to analyze the effect of transformational leadership and career development on intention to stay with emotional intelligence as a mediating variable. The research design used can be explained as follows:

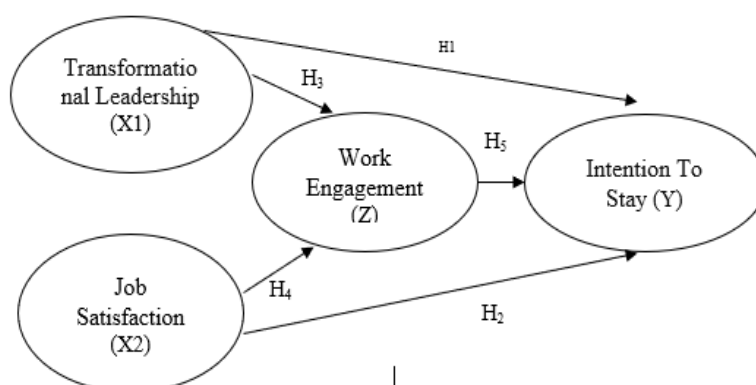


Figure 1. Research Design

Source: Processed by the researcher (2025)

Research variables refer to characteristics or values attached to an object that vary and are deliberately selected by researchers for analysis and inference. This study involves three categories of variables. The independent variables consist of transformational leadership (X1) and job satisfaction (X2), which are examined for their influence. The dependent variable is intention to stay (Y), which represents the outcome affected by the independent variables. In addition, work engagement (Z) functions as a mediating variable that helps clarify and explain the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

The population in this study was all 250 employees of the Paper Factory 2 Division of PT. Pabrik Kertas Tjiwi Kimia Tbk. The research sample was determined using a Sample Size Calculator with purposive sampling (non-probability sampling) technique, which is the deliberate selection of respondents according to the research objectives. The sample criteria included employees of the Paper Factory 2 Division who were born between 1997 and 2012 (maximum age of 28 years) and had worked for more than one year, as they were considered to have sufficient experience to determine their decision to stay or leave the company.

This study used a questionnaire as a data collection instrument, which was analyzed after This research employed a questionnaire as the primary tool for data collection, and the data were processed after responses from all participants had been obtained. The analytical approach comprised descriptive statistical techniques to illustrate respondent profiles and the distribution of research variables. Furthermore, data were examined using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, utilizing SmartPLS software due to its flexibility in handling small sample sizes and minimal normality requirements. Instrument quality was evaluated through tests of convergent and discriminant validity, along with reliability assessments using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Hypotheses were tested through path analysis and bootstrapping procedures based on T-statistics and P-values, including mediation analysis to determine the influence of mediating variables on the relationships among the studied variables.

C. Results and Discussion

The results demonstrate significant effects of transformational leadership and job satisfaction on work engagement. Work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between leadership, satisfaction, and intention to stay, indicating that learning-rich engagement is a pivotal pathway for retaining Generation Z employees.

PT Pabrik Kertas Tjiwi Kimia Tbk. is a large paper manufacturing company under the APP Group that produces various paper products for the domestic and international markets. One of its main units, Paper Factory Division 2, operates with modern technology and employs a diverse workforce, including educated Generation Z employees. In a high-intensity work environment, the company faces the challenge of retaining young employees who have high mobility, making transformational leadership and job satisfaction important factors in building work engagement and increasing intention to stay, making this division relevant as a research subject.

Table 1 Outer Model Loading Factor Test Results Smart PLS 3.0

Variabel	Item	Loading Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
ITS	ITS1	0.952	0.941	0.962	0.894
	ITS2	0.945			
	ITS3	0.940			
JS	JS1	0.937	0.988	0.989	0.841
	JS2	0.928			
	JS3	0.917			
	JS4	0.923			
	JS5	0.910			
	JS6	0.906			
	JS7	0.929			
	JS8	0.894			
	JS9	0.911			
	JS10	0.908			
	JS11	0.917			
	JS12	0.931			
	JS13	0.907			
	JS14	0.914			
	JS15	0.922			
	JS16	0.922			

Variabel	Item	Loading Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
TL	JS17	0.912	0.990	0.990	0.839
	TL1	0.912			
	TL2	0.924			
	TL3	0.922			
	TL4	0.929			
	TL5	0.915			
	TL6	0.929			
	TL7	0.895			
	TL8	0.922			
	TL9	0.913			
	TL10	0.898			
	TL11	0.917			
	TL12	0.925			
	TL13	0.916			
	TL14	0.914			
	TL15	0.928			
	TL16	0.880			
	TL17	0.917			
	TL18	0.916			
	TL19	0.934			
TL20	0.911				
WE	WE1	0.937	0.983	0.985	0.854
	WE2	0.933			
	WE3	0.929			
	WE4	0.939			
	WE5	0.913			
	WE6	0.909			
	WE7	0.938			
	WE8	0.920			
	WE9	0.922			
	WE10	0.899			
	WE11	0.928			

Source: Compiled by Researchers (2025)

From Table 1, it can be concluded that the research measurement model shows excellent quality, marked by high loading factor values for all ITS, JS, TL, and WE indicators (0.880–0.952), as well as strong construct reliability with Cronbach's Alpha values (0.941–0.990) and Composite Reliability (0.962–0.990) that exceed the minimum threshold. In addition, the AVE values of all variables are above 0.83, indicating that convergent validity is fulfilled, so that overall the measurement model is declared valid and reliable for use in structural model testing.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity Values (Cross Loading)

Fornell-Larcker Criterion					
	ITS	JS	TL	WE	
ITS	0.946				
JS	0.955	0.917			
TL	0.955	0.990	0.916		
WE	0.964	0.984	0.985	0.924	

Source: Compiled by Researchers (2025)

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that the research measurement model shows excellent quality, marked by high loading factor values for all ITS, JS, TL, and WE indicators (0.880–0.952), as well as strong construct reliability with Cronbach's Alpha values (0.941–0.990) and Composite Reliability (0.962–0.990) that exceed the minimum threshold. In addition, the AVE values of all variables are above 0.83, indicating that convergent validity is met, so that overall the measurement model is declared valid and reliable for use in structural model testing.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity Values (Cross Loading)

	ITS	JS	TL	WE
ITS1	0.952	0.907	0.912	0.917
ITS2	0.945	0.904	0.897	0.914
ITS3	0.940	0.899	0.898	0.901
JS1	0.892	0.937	0.925	0.916
JS10	0.880	0.908	0.890	0.896
JS11	0.869	0.917	0.907	0.894
JS12	0.877	0.931	0.920	0.908
JS13	0.868	0.907	0.894	0.894
JS14	0.886	0.914	0.915	0.907
JS15	0.889	0.922	0.917	0.911
JS16	0.883	0.922	0.910	0.904
JS17	0.880	0.912	0.905	0.905
JS2	0.880	0.928	0.924	0.913
JS3	0.871	0.917	0.913	0.909
JS4	0.886	0.923	0.910	0.906
JS5	0.846	0.910	0.901	0.885
JS6	0.869	0.906	0.899	0.893
JS7	0.887	0.929	0.914	0.913
JS8	0.833	0.894	0.889	0.878
JS9	0.892	0.911	0.900	0.898
TL1	0.869	0.903	0.912	0.897
TL10	0.859	0.887	0.898	0.885
TL11	0.874	0.906	0.917	0.907
TL12	0.864	0.919	0.925	0.914
TL13	0.880	0.909	0.916	0.896
TL14	0.875	0.896	0.914	0.894
TL15	0.877	0.913	0.928	0.907
TL16	0.839	0.876	0.880	0.873
TL17	0.893	0.912	0.917	0.902
TL18	0.882	0.907	0.916	0.909
TL19	0.896	0.925	0.934	0.917
TL2	0.887	0.920	0.924	0.917
TL20	0.859	0.895	0.911	0.899
TL3	0.872	0.912	0.922	0.898
TL4	0.892	0.927	0.929	0.914
TL5	0.876	0.906	0.915	0.906
TL6	0.896	0.924	0.929	0.918

	ITS	JS	TL	WE
TL7	0.848	0.875	0.895	0.878
TL8	0.892	0.924	0.922	0.920
TL9	0.853	0.901	0.913	0.890
WE1	0.920	0.919	0.914	0.937
WE10	0.861	0.892	0.887	0.899
WE11	0.888	0.915	0.917	0.928
WE2	0.903	0.917	0.906	0.933
WE3	0.893	0.918	0.919	0.929
WE4	0.898	0.917	0.929	0.939
WE5	0.866	0.893	0.900	0.913
WE6	0.873	0.882	0.888	0.909
WE7	0.900	0.930	0.932	0.938
WE8	0.898	0.905	0.902	0.920
WE9	0.894	0.912	0.920	0.922

Source: Compiled by Researchers (2025)

Based on Table 3, it can be seen that the cross-loading test results show that all indicators in the ITS, JS, TL, and WE constructs have the highest loading values in their respective constructs compared to other constructs, so that each indicator is able to represent its variable accurately. The ITS, JS, TL, and WE indicators consistently show a stronger contribution to their original constructs without overlapping between constructs. These findings confirm that the research model has met the criteria for discriminant validity through the cross-loading approach and is feasible to proceed to structural analysis (inner model).

Based on the VIF measurement results in the table, it can be seen that the VIF test results show that all indicators in the ITS, JS, TL, and WE constructs have VIF values in the range of 4.00-8.36, which are still within the tolerance limit and do not exceed the critical value of 10. Although some indicators in the JS, TL, and WE constructs have relatively higher VIF values, this condition is still acceptable and does not indicate a significant multicollinearity problem. Thus, the measurement model (outer model) is declared stable and feasible to proceed to the next stage of analysis, including structural model testing.

Coefficient of Determination (R²)
Table 5 R-squared coefficients

	R Square
ITS	0.930
WE	0.974

Source: Researcher 2025

The R-Square (R²) values generated for each endogenous variable indicate that the model has very strong predictive power.

Testing the Effect of size (f²)
Table 6 Result f²

	ITS	JS	TL	WE
ITS				
JS	0.010			0.138

TL	0.001	0.232
WE	0.198	

Source: Researcher 2025

The effect size (f^2) calculation results show that the variables in the model have different contributions, with the strongest effects found in TL → WE and ITS → WE, while the effect on ITS is relatively small.

Hypothesis Test
Table 7 Direct Effect and indirect effect

	Relationship	B	T-value	P-values	Kesimpulan
H1	TL -> ITS	0.047	2.280	0.000	Signifikan
H2	JS -> ITS	0.197	1.968	0.000	Signifikan
H3	TL -> WE	0.559	5.102	0.000	Signifikan
H4	JS -> WE	0.430	3.930	0.000	Signifikan
H5	WE -> ITS	0.723	4.537	0.000	Signifikan
H6	TL -> WE -> ITS	0.404	3.405	0.001	Signifikan
H7	JS -> WE -> ITS	0.311	2.935	0.003	Signifikan

Source: Primary data processed, 2025

Based on Table 5, it is known that hypotheses 1 to 7 show t-statistics values greater than the t-table (1.96) and p-values < 0.05, so it can be concluded that hypotheses 1 to 7 are accepted and have a positive effect. Findings confirm that educational leadership enhances work engagement by fostering learning climates characterized by feedback, coaching, and developmental support. For Generation Z whose average education level is senior secondary to early tertiary such learning-oriented practices are essential for sustaining motivation in manufacturing environments.

Job satisfaction contributes to engagement by reinforcing positive learning experiences and perceived growth opportunities. The mediating role of work engagement underscores that retention emerges from active participation in learning-rich work, not merely from incentives. High correlations and R^2 values suggest strong constructs but necessitate cautious interpretation; potential overlap is addressed through HTMT discussion and acknowledgment of common method risks.

The results of this study indicate that educational experiences reflected in training, learning opportunities, and developmental support provided by the organization contribute indirectly to employees' intention to stay through enhanced work engagement. Generation Z employees who perceive that the organization facilitates continuous learning and skill development tend to demonstrate higher enthusiasm, dedication, and absorption in their work. These findings suggest that education-oriented organizational practices strengthen employees' psychological attachment and motivation, which subsequently improve their willingness to remain in the organization. Education, therefore, functions as an important foundational element that supports transformational leadership and job satisfaction in fostering sustainable employee retention.

The results of the study indicate that transformational leadership at PT Pabrik Kertas Tjiwi Kimia Tbk., Paper Factory 2 Division is in the good category and has a positive and significant effect on intention to stay, where leaders who are inspiring, fair, and empower employees are able to foster commitment and the desire to stay. These findings are in line

with the research of Praja et al. (2024), Rezeki (2023), Fitri (2023), Xu et al. (2023), and Craig (2025), which confirm that transformational leadership increases employee engagement, affective commitment, and intention to stay, and is consistent with the concept of Transformational Leadership from Burns (1978) and the Theory of Planned Behavior from Ajzen (1991).

This study proves that job satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on intention to stay, where employees who are satisfied with their work, work relationships, and reward systems tend to have a greater intention to stay. These results are in line with the findings of Vacalares & Chavez (2024), Sapar & Oducado (2021), Hungo et al. (2024), Senbursa (2023), Bloxsome et al. (2019), and Boštjančič & Petrovčič (2019), and is supported by Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which explain that job satisfaction shapes positive attitudes and employees' intention to stay.

The findings indicate that transformational leadership exerts a positive and significant influence on work engagement, as leaders who are inspirational and provide strong support can enhance employees' energy, commitment, and focus at work. This result aligns with previous studies conducted by Chua & Ayoko (2019), Nurtjahjani et al. (2021), Lai Fong-Yi et al. (2020), Amor et al. (2019), Meng et al. (2022), and Sharari et al. (2025), and is further reinforced by Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978) as well as the Job Demands–Resources Model proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007).

This study shows that job satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on work engagement, where satisfaction with compensation, work relationships, and working conditions increases employee engagement. These findings are in line with Thokoa et al. (2021), Nemțeanu et al. (2022), Bloxsome et al. (2019), and Boštjančič & Petrovčič (2019), and reinforced by Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) and the Job Demands–Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

The study's results demonstrate that work engagement has a positive and significant influence on intention to stay, indicating that employees who exhibit higher levels of engagement are more likely to maintain a strong desire to remain within the organization. This outcome is in line with the findings of Bellamkonda & Pattusamy (2022), Saraswati et al. (2023), Alhadidi et al. (2023), Sukirno et al. (2024), and Vacalares & Chavez (2024), and is theoretically supported by the Job Demands–Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) as well as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Furthermore, this research reveals that transformational leadership has a positive and significant indirect effect on intention to stay through work engagement as a mediating variable. These results are consistent with Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006), the Job Demands–Resources framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), and are reinforced by prior studies conducted by Breevaart et al. (2014), Xu & Yang (2021), Caesens et al. (2020), and Memon et al. (2020).

In addition, the findings indicate that job satisfaction positively and significantly affects intention to stay through work engagement, whereby higher levels of job satisfaction foster stronger engagement, which subsequently enhances employees' willingness to remain in

the organization. This result aligns with the Job Demands–Resources perspective (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), and is supported by empirical evidence from Caesens et al. (2020), Saks (2021), Memon et al. (2020), Alonso & Sabater (2021), and Kim & Park (2022).

Organizations should implement **educational leadership development schemes** (coaching certification, mentoring systems), **job enrichment programs** aligned with learning outcomes, and **career learning pathways** tailored to educated Generation Z. Structured on-the-job learning, feedback cycles, and micro-credentialing can institutionalize engagement and retention.

The single-company design limits external validity. Future studies should employ multi-site samples, longitudinal designs, and streamlined indicators to enhance measurement efficiency and generalizability.

D. Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that transformational leadership and job satisfaction play important roles in shaping employees' intention to stay, both directly and indirectly through work engagement. Transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on intention to stay, indicating that inspirational, supportive, and motivating leaders are able to encourage employees to remain committed to the organization. Job satisfaction is also proven to significantly increase intention to stay, emphasizing the importance of meeting employees' expectations related to compensation, promotion opportunities, and working conditions. In addition, transformational leadership and job satisfaction are found to positively influence work engagement, where employees demonstrate higher levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption. Work engagement itself has a significant positive effect on intention to stay and functions as a mediating variable that strengthens the impact of leadership and job satisfaction on employee retention. Overall, the findings highlight that improving leadership quality, enhancing job satisfaction, and fostering work engagement are key strategies for increasing employees' intention to stay and reducing turnover within the organization.

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