

# The Mediating Role of Ikigai at Work in the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Turnover Intention Among IT Employees

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**ABSTRACT:** High employee attrition and disengagement remain major challenges in the Indian information technology (IT) sector, creating an urgent need for effective leadership and retention strategies. This study investigates the mediating role of Ikigai at work in the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention among IT professionals. Rooted in the Japanese concept of purpose and meaning in life, Ikigai is examined as a psychological resource that may enhance employee engagement and reduce turnover intention. A quantitative research design was adopted using survey data collected from 362 IT professionals in India. Established and validated measurement scales were employed to assess transformational leadership, Ikigai at work, and turnover intention. The proposed relationships were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on employees' sense of Ikigai at work, while Ikigai demonstrates a significant negative relationship with turnover intention. Furthermore, the direct relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention was found to be statistically non-significant after introducing Ikigai, indicating a full mediating effect. These results suggest that transformational leaders contribute to employee retention primarily by fostering a sense of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment at work. The study contributes to leadership and organizational behavior literature by integrating Ikigai into employee retention models within the IT context. It extends existing knowledge on psychological resources and meaningful work by demonstrating the importance of purpose-driven leadership in reducing turnover intention. Practically, the findings provide valuable implications for organizations seeking to improve employee retention through leadership development initiatives, meaningful work practices, and psychologically supportive workplace environments.

**Keywords:** Ikigai at work, transformational leadership, turnover intention, IT sector, employee retention, meaningful work, PLS-SEM.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Employee retention has become a crucial organisational concern in today's fast-paced and changing workplace, especially in the information technology (IT) sector. High turnover rates not only increase the cost of recruiting and onboarding new staff but also disrupt team continuity and information flow, which ultimately impedes innovation and productivity [1]. Leadership style and the psychological aspects that affect employee commitment have received much attention in research and practice as businesses look for long-term ways to keep talented workers [2]. Out of all the different leadership philosophies,

transformational leadership has been repeatedly associated with favourable employee outcomes, such as higher levels of engagement, job satisfaction, and decreased turnover intention [3]. Employees are inspired, motivated, and supported by transformational leaders who create a sense of commitment and belonging by coordinating personal objectives with the group's aim [4]. However, little is known about the psychological processes by which this leadership style is associated with retention results, particularly in the IT sector, where job mobility and fast change are prevalent.

The idea of *Ikigai*, which means "a reason for being" in Japanese, is one new lens through which to view employee motivation and retention [5]. *Ikigai*, which has its roots in existential and psychological traditions, represents a situation in which people feel that their passions, their skills, the needs of the world, and their compensation all line up [6]. *Ikigai* at work, when applied to the workplace, describes the sense of fulfilment, meaning, and purpose that workers get from their jobs [7]. Workers are more likely to be devoted, resilient, and intrinsically driven if they believe their work has purpose. *Ikigai* thus embodies a comprehensive sense of purpose that can operate as a protective barrier against burnout, disengagement, and turnover, in addition to professional pleasure [8]. *Ikigai* is becoming more and more relevant in global organisational environments despite its philosophical and cultural roots, particularly as contemporary workers look for more fulfilling and value-driven professions [9]. Fostering a feeling of purpose could be a differentiator in retention tactics in industries like IT, where cognitive demands are high and job change is common [10]. Leaders have a significant impact on how workers view their jobs [11]. Through vision-setting and tailored support, a transformational leader can help staff members discover more purpose in their work, which will motivate them to participate more completely and imagine a future with the company [4]. This places *Ikigai* in a position to explain how leadership behaviours result in retention-related outcomes, both as a psychological outcome and as a possible mediating construct.

Recent research emphasises how important transformational leadership is in influencing the intentions of employees to leave, which are frequently influenced by elements like work satisfaction and organisational loyalty. For instance, while transformational leadership positively relates to organisational commitment, it has no appreciable effect on turnover intention in the hospitality sector. The relationship between transformational leadership and knowledge workers' intention to leave was also examined by [12], who emphasised the moderating influence of job embeddedness and the mediation role of person-organization fit. Though it symbolises a feeling of meaning and purpose in life, the concept of *Ikigai* has mostly been studied about motivation and well-being; few empirical studies have looked at its function in organisational contexts. Although [8] highlighted *Ikigai*'s potential influence on employee engagement and well-being in their integrated cognitive-motivational model of the practice in the workplace, there is still a dearth of empirical support for this claim. Furthermore, the Indian IT industry, which continues to have significant turnover rates, has received little attention in research; *Ikigai*'s cultural significance may provide fresh perspectives. To close this gap, this study aims to examine how *Ikigai* at work mediates the relationship between turnover intention and transformational leadership among Indian IT workers.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) theory, which offers a strong framework for comprehending how different job-related aspects affect employee motivation, well-being, and organisational outcomes like turnover intention, serves as the foundation for this study. According to the JD–R model, which was created by [13], every element of work settings can be divided into two categories: job resources (such as support, autonomy, and feedback) or job demands (such as workload and emotional stressors). Job resources have a motivating role in promoting engagement, resilience, and retention, but excessive expectations on employees can result in burnout and disengagement. Personal resources, positive self-perceptions, or psychological abilities that affect people's capacity to influence and manage their surroundings are a crucial component of the JD–R hypothesis. Characteristics like optimism, resilience, self-efficacy, and a sense of purpose or meaningfulness at work are among them. Through improving employees' motivation and psychological

fortitude, personal resources not only mitigate the negative effects of job demands but also increase their positive effects. According to this theory, Ikigai at work, the experience of balancing one's professional function, social contribution, personal passion, and strengths, can be thought of as a personal asset. Workers are more likely to view their jobs as meaningful and rewarding when they feel a strong sense of Ikigai, which boosts intrinsic motivation and lowers the urge to quit the company.

A key factor in determining one's professional and personal resources is transformational leadership. An atmosphere full of support, independence, and growth chances is typically produced by leaders who inspire, intellectually challenge, and demonstrate individual consideration. Employee purpose, psychological safety, and personal development are likely to be promoted by these leadership traits. In this sense, transformational leaders could indirectly foster workers' Ikigai experiences by assisting them in making a connection between their work and a greater sense of personal fulfilment and social responsibility. Therefore, the JD-R theory offers a strong basis for the suggested model, in which the improvement of Ikigai at work (personal resource) through transformational leadership (job resource) influences turnover intention (result). By combining these concepts, the study provides a fresh perspective on how leadership practices might foster workers' inner drives and feelings of purpose, hence lowering employee attrition. This mediating pathway also shows how, in high-demand sectors like IT, workforce management is moving away from transactional retention tactics (such as pay and benefits) and towards a more humanistic, meaning-centred approach.

Despite its Japanese philosophical roots, Ikigai's fundamental ideas, meaning, purpose, contribution, and the connection of one's personal beliefs with one's work, resonate well in collectivistic and emerging-economy countries like India. Ikigai offers a culturally flexible paradigm for comprehending how leadership promotes meaningful participation in the Indian IT industry, where identity and purpose concerns coexist with high performance demands and rapid technical development. The construct can therefore be conceptually applied outside of its initial cultural context.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The potential and hypothetical relationship between independent and dependent variables is depicted in Figure 1. It illustrates how IT workers' intentions to leave are impacted by transformational leadership. Furthermore, Figure 1 shows that Ikigai at work acts as a mediator in the connection between turnover intention and transformational leadership.

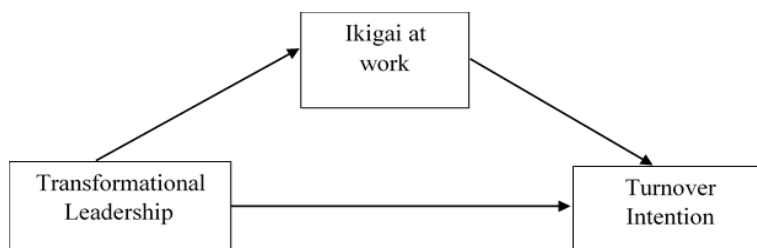


FIGURE 1. Conceptual model.

### 2.1 Transformational leadership on Turnover intention

A popular topic in organisational behaviour studies is transformational leadership, which is characterised by inspiring and motivating followers through intellectual stimulation, visionary leadership, and individualised attention. Numerous studies concur that it plays a critical role in reducing the sneaky threat of employee turnover intentions, highlighting the significant influence that these leadership philosophies have on retention rates [14]. The data points to transformational leadership as a change agent rather than just a theoretical concept. According to [15], it functions as a powerful elixir, supporting important elements known to counteract the desire to leave, such as job satisfaction, organisational identity, and the elusive spark of work engagement. For example, transformational leaders' tailored responses to workers' needs greatly increase job satisfaction, which in turn reduces intent to leave [16]. Or think about the strong case made by

[17] that such leaders' visionary leadership inspires a strong organisational commitment, which lessens the appeal of better opportunities.

Contextual elements, including industry-specific demands and cultural influences, however, may have an impact on the intricate relationship between leadership style and turnover intention [18]. According to [19], the very nature of this fast-paced sector demands leaders who can both inspire innovation and offer the intellectual stimulation that keeps it going, qualities that are central to the transformational leadership philosophy. The ability of a leader to motivate, engage people intellectually, and show them individual attention are characteristics of transformational leadership. Several studies have demonstrated that transformational leaders improve organisational identity, decrease withdrawal behaviours, and forge closer psychological ties with their workforce. Such leadership becomes essential in keeping personnel in the IT sector, where job mobility is strong and change occurs quickly. Employees are more likely to develop commitment and have fewer plans to leave when their leaders challenge them, offer assistance, and advance the company's mission.

- H1: Transformational leadership is negatively associated with employee turnover intention.

### *2.2 Transformational leadership on Ikigai at work*

The power of transformational leadership to provide meaning, purpose, and personal development in the workplace is well known. Four essential components make up this leadership approach, which [20] first proposed: intellectual stimulation, inspiring motivation, idealised influence, and personalised attention. By encouraging employees to align their ambitions with the overarching objectives of the company, this style of leadership creates a stronger feeling of purpose and a shared vision in the workplace [21]. When people believe their work is significant, relevant, and consistent with their personal beliefs, they are more likely to cultivate Ikigai. According to research, transformational leadership has a major impact on workers' perceptions of meaningful employment. For instance, transformational leadership was positively correlated with views of the meaningfulness of work, which were correlated with increased engagement [22]. Similarly, [23] discovered that the relationship between innovative behaviour and transformational leadership was mediated by meaningful work, supporting the notion that purpose-driven leadership strengthens workers' psychological bonds with their jobs.

Transformational leaders foster an atmosphere where workers can find personal fulfilment in their work by utilising developmental feedback, empowerment, and acknowledgement [24]. The fundamental elements of Ikigai, what one loves, what one is excellent at, what the world needs, and what one is paid for, are aligned with this leadership style, which reframes work as a means of self-expression and contribution to a greater good rather than just a task [25]. All things considered, transformational leadership can act as a psychological stimulant for Ikigai at work by motivating staff members, promoting congruence between individual and corporate ideals, and stimulating a feeling of development and direction. This relationship is particularly pertinent in today's knowledge-driven businesses, as workers are more interested in finding meaning and success in their work.

- H2: Transformational leadership is positively associated with Ikigai at work.

### *2.3 Ikigai at work on Turnover intention*

Strong Ikigai experiences at work increase an employee's likelihood of exhibiting psychological involvement, intrinsic motivation, and a long-term dedication to their company. Japanese culture is the source of the idea of Ikigai. It highlights the relationship between passion, mission, vocation, and profession, which helps people find meaning and fulfilment in their job [25]. Ikigai in organisational contexts measures how much workers believe their work reflects their values, fosters their personal development, and advances a larger goal. This can greatly lower the risk of voluntary turnover. According to research, turnover intention is inversely correlated with meaningful work, a concept that is strongly tied to Ikigai. According to [26], workers are more inclined to stick with their company despite stress or better possibilities if they believe their work has purpose. Affective commitment, which reduces withdrawal intentions by acting as a psychological anchor due to an individual's emotional engagement to their work, explains this association [27]. Similar to this, Self-Determination Theory asserts that long-term engagement and internal motivation

are fuelled by the satisfaction of intrinsic needs like relatedness and purpose, which reduces the risk of turnover [28].

Additionally, Ikigai may serve as a psychological buffer that protects workers from burnout, disengagement, and job discontent. According to [29], people with high Ikigai are more likely to view their work roles favourably, find fulfilment in routine tasks, and show resilience when faced with difficulties. These psychological advantages are particularly crucial in high-stress workplaces where emotional depletion and a lack of direction frequently lead to turnover intention. Therefore, by increasing their sense of purpose, belonging, and contribution, Ikigai at work can be a vital tool for employee retention. According to the body of research, companies are more likely to retain talent and lower the rate of voluntary departures when they provide environments that allow workers to experience Ikigai, such as through meaningful positions, value alignment, and personal development.

- H3: Ikigai at work is negatively associated with employee turnover intention.

#### 2.4 Mediating role of Ikigai at work

According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) theory, employee performance and well-being are impacted by the availability of both personal and job resources, as well as the equilibrium between job demands [13, 30]. Even though professional demands like workload and emotional stress can lead to burnout and turnover, personal resources, qualities of the self that are linked to resilience and the ability to influence and manage one's surroundings, play a protective and motivating role, according to [31]. According to this perspective, Ikigai at work can be viewed as a psychological resource that creates intrinsic drive, meaning, and purpose. The way that workers view meaningful work is greatly influenced by transformational leaders. Using motivating inspiration and personalised attention, they urge staff members to match their work with their objectives and principles [21]. By improving employees' sense of fulfilment and purpose, two essential elements of Ikigai, this technique encourages emotional investment and lessens withdrawal symptoms. Through its effect on perceived meaning in work, transformational leadership improves psychological well-being and work engagement, as proposed by [22]. According to this reasoning, Ikigai converts leadership-driven purpose into long-term organisational commitment, thereby mediating the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention.

Additionally, studies indicate that the relationship between leadership and retention is mediated by psychological concepts such as career calling and professional meaningfulness [26, 23]. By providing employees with a compelling incentive to remain with their company, Ikigai, which places a comprehensive emphasis on congruence between values, strengths, and social contribution [25], operates similarly. Even in demanding or stressful work circumstances, people with high levels of Ikigai are less likely to leave their jobs because they are more likely to internalise their tasks as significant rather than relying on outside incentives. Thus, Ikigai at work is conceptualised in this study as a mediating mechanism that explains how transformational leadership enhances psychological enrichment and intrinsic meaning rather than transactional rewards to decrease turnover intention.

- H4: Ikigai at work mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee turnover intention.

### 3. KEY CONTRIBUTIONS FROM PREVIOUS WORKS OF LITERATURE

**Table 1.** Key contributions.

SL. NO.	AUTHOR	YEAR	KEY CONTRIBUTIONS
1	[51]	2023	Research on the topic in private high schools in Pakistan indicates that transformational leadership harms turnover intention.
2	[12]	2023	Investigated the relationship between knowledge workers' intention to leave and transformational leadership, identifying job embeddedness as a moderator and person-organization fit as a mediator.

3	[57]	2023	Examined how transformational leadership affected the intention to leave an organisation in Indonesia, using job satisfaction and organisational commitment as mediating factors.
4	[23]	2019	Investigated how meaningful work mediated the relationship between innovative work practices and transformational leadership, indicating that meaningful work amplifies the benefits of transformational leadership.
6	[53]	2017	Investigated how the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention in the public sector is mediated by affective commitment and employee engagement.
7	[52]	2017	Examined the association between transformational leadership and the intention of Thai café employees to leave, as well as the mediating roles of trust and job performance.
8	[55]	2016	Examined the mediating effects of psychological empowerment and trust in the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intentions in Indian IT SMEs.
9	[54]	2015	Investigated how transformational leadership and job performance in the higher education sector are mediated by leader-member interaction and relational identity.

Relatively few studies have looked at the role of Ikigai at work, a Japanese concept that refers to a sense of purpose and meaning in life, in this dynamic, even though the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention has been thoroughly studied, with an emphasis on mediators like job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and employee engagement are mentioned in the Table 1. There has been little empirical research done in the Indian IT sector, which is marked by high turnover rates and distinctive cultural dynamics; the majority of previous studies have been on Western contexts or other Asian nations. Furthermore, the specific construct of Ikigai, which encompasses a holistic sense of purpose, has not been properly addressed in organisational settings, even though ideas like meaningful work have been studied as mediators. To better understand how creating a sense of purpose at work can affect employee retention, this gap highlights the need for research that incorporates Ikigai into the framework of transformational leadership and turnover intention, especially within the Indian IT industry.

#### 4. RESEARCH GAP AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Previous research in the Indian IT sector investigating transformational leadership and turnover intention has primarily depended on mediating variables such organizational commitment, job satisfaction, employee engagement, empowerment, and burnout. Although these dimensions elucidate significant work-related attitudes, they predominantly exhibit fragmentation and specificity to particular roles. So far, empirical research in the Indian IT context has not looked at Ikigai as a whole, purpose-driven idea that brings together meaning, passion, value alignment, and contribution. This constitutes a significant deficiency, especially in knowledge-intensive settings where employee retention is increasingly influenced by profound motivational and existential concerns rather than solely transactional job elements.

This research presents four key contributions. First, it presents Ikigai as an innovative mediation mechanism in the interaction between transformative leadership and turnover intention within the Indian IT sector. Second, it builds on transformational leadership theory by showing that leadership is linked to turnover intention indirectly through employees' sense of purpose instead of directly. Third, it adds to cross-cultural organizational psychology by putting Ikigai, a concept based on Japanese philosophy, into an Indian professional setting. Finally, the study improves the scientific rigor of PLS-SEM by adding robustness checks, mediation validation, predictive assessment, and bias diagnostics.

### III. RESEARCH METHODS

#### 1. RESEARCH DESIGN

With an emphasis on the mediating function of Ikigai at work among employees in the Indian IT sector, this study attempts to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee turnover intention. High turnover rates and personnel mobility remain significant problems in this sector, especially in the post-pandemic era, with employee values shifting, burnout, and digital acceleration. To investigate a mediation hypothesis involving three variables, this study uses an explanatory design and is empirical, according to the psychological research design taxonomy. The study uses structural equation modelling (SEM) to adopt a latent variable design (LVD). Its two main components are the outer model, which looks at how well the observed indicators reflect their corresponding constructs, and the inner model, which assesses the relationships among the latent constructs (transformational leadership, Ikigai at work, and turnover intention). Because it is appropriate for theory development, small to intermediate sample sizes, and models combining mediation and formative components, the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) technique was used. This approach, which is popular in management and behavioural research, calculates model parameters using explained variances. Additionally, because their expertise is directly related to the study's goals, purposive sampling [32] was used to find individuals who are actively working for IT companies.

#### 2. SAMPLE SIZE AND DATA COLLECTION

Data were gathered from workers currently employed in the Indian IT industry to investigate the mediating function of Ikigai at work in the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention. To guarantee a sufficient response rate that would satisfy the requirements for structural equation modelling, 450 online questionnaires were disseminated in total. Following the ten-time rule for PLS-SEM research and power analysis recommendations, the goal was to gather at least 300 completed responses [33]. The G\*Power 3.1.9.7 application was used to conduct a power analysis to determine the absolute minimum required sample size. Based on medium effect size ( $f^2 = 0.15$ ), 80% power, and an alpha level of 0.05, the analysis indicated that 292 responses would be sufficient for model estimation combining three components [34]. However, to improve generalizability and take non-responses into account, data were collected from 362 IT specialists between January and February 2025.

The data was gathered through an online survey that participants self-administered and shared via professional networks such as LinkedIn and email. Purposive sampling and systematic random sampling were used in tandem. IT businesses' HR departments were contacted first, and lists of qualified workers were acquired from them. To ensure randomisation within a carefully chosen sample, every fifth employee on the list was chosen in a serial sequence. Enterprises with more than 300 employees received 40 questions, whilst smaller enterprises with fewer than 120 employees received 15. This indicates that organisations with larger workforces received proportionately more questionnaires. Thirty IT experts participated in a pilot study to evaluate the instrument's clarity and dependability before the full-scale data gathering. The phrasing and scale presentation were slightly altered in response to participant comments. Part B of the final instrument included validated scales measuring transformational leadership, Ikigai at work, and turnover intention. The entire data collection method was conducted following strict ethical guidelines. Informed consent was given, participants were guaranteed secrecy and anonymity, and participation was completely voluntary. Before data collection, participants were provided with information about the study's goals and methods. They also had to give their consent electronically before doing the survey. No personally identifiable information was collected, and responses were logged and evaluated in aggregated form to further protect anonymity. The researchers kept the data they acquired safe on password-protected systems that only they could access. They will only keep the data for academic purposes for a short time before permanently deleting it.

#### 3. MEASURES

The three main concepts of transformational leadership, Ikigai at work, and turnover intention were evaluated in this study using known and verified scales. A standard answer format in organisational

behaviour research, the five-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree," was used to administer all measurements. Prior research has thoroughly tested these tools in a variety of cultural and professional contexts, and they have shown acceptable levels of construct validity and internal consistency. The study employed the Global Transformational Leadership (GTL) Scale, which was created by [35], to evaluate transformational leadership. The six items on the scale represent the fundamental actions of transformational leaders, such as establishing trust, fostering innovation, acknowledging individual contributions, and clearly expressing a vision. In organisational leadership research, this one-dimensional scale has demonstrated both parsimoniousness and psychometric robustness [35].

The nine categories on this scale are intended to highlight the multifaceted nature of Ikigai, encompassing elements of future-focused motivation, personal development, life fulfilment, and service to others [36]. Strong construct validity and internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha > 0.80) have been proven by the Ikigai-9, which has been widely used in clinical and workplace studies [36, 29]. In keeping with earlier workplace uses of the scale, the items were slightly reworded for this study to reflect a work-contextual interpretation. The 3-item scale [37], one of the most used tools for assessing employees' desire to leave a company, was used to measure turnover intention. The items assess the likelihood of looking for new employment, the frequency of thoughts about resigning, and the chance of leaving the current position. This measure has been well evaluated in a variety of occupational situations and has demonstrated strong predictive validity for real turnover behaviour [37, 38]. To guarantee clarity, relevance, and dependability in the context of the Indian IT sector, all scales were pretested in a pilot study involving thirty IT experts. Without changing the conceptual meaning of the original constructions, minor changes were made to the item language in response to pilot input. In line with earlier research in organisational psychology and leadership, the use of established measures guarantees methodological rigour. The corresponding author will provide replication materials, such as the survey questionnaire, construct coding rules, and SmartPLS model specifications, upon reasonable request, while adhering to ethical and confidentiality considerations.

## IV. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### 1. ASSESSMENT OF THE MEASUREMENT MODEL

Factor loadings and multicollinearity diagnostics were analysed for each indicator to evaluate the measurement model. Item dependability was confirmed by the fact that all factor loadings for the constructs of transformational leadership, Ikigai at work, and turnover intention, as indicated in Table 2, above the minimum criterion of 0.70 [33]. Accordingly, every object is a good representation of the hidden construct that it represents. Furthermore, all items' VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values were much below the suggested upper limit of 3.3 [39], suggesting that multicollinearity was not a problem. All items have a moderate degree of agreement, according to the means and standard deviations, with mean scores often above 3.5. The reliability and lucidity of the measurement items employed in this investigation are supported by these findings.

**Table 2.** Measurement scale items.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Factor loading	VIF
ikw1	3.515	1.028	0.733	1.894
ikw2	3.586	0.966	0.768	2.031
ikw3	3.539	0.979	0.736	1.817
ikw4	3.665	0.945	0.763	1.948

ikw5	3.648	0.976	0.759	1.855
ikw6	3.564	0.957	0.708	1.664
ikw7	3.547	0.963	0.713	1.696
ikw8	3.658	0.936	0.717	1.697
ikw9	3.638	0.941	0.729	1.71
TL1	3.653	1.067	0.74	1.732
TL2	3.631	0.998	0.798	2.01
TL3	3.648	1.032	0.84	2.355
TL4	3.542	0.999	0.814	2.088
TL5	3.478	1.026	0.797	2.042
TL6	3.576	1.054	0.772	1.934
TI1	3.65	0.998	0.827	1.48
TI2	3.527	1.033	0.81	1.539
TI3	3.51	1.05	0.828	1.599

## 2. ERROR ANALYSIS: COMMON METHOD BIAS

Because the data were cross-sectional and self-reported, the full collinearity variance inflation factor (VIF) method was used to directly check for common method bias at the construct level. In accordance with accepted PLS-SEM protocols, each latent construct was regressed against all other constructs within the model, and the resultant full collinearity VIF values were analysed. Table 3 shows that all of the construct-level VIFs were below the cautious threshold of 3.3. This means that common technique bias is not likely to be a big problem for the study's conclusions. Table 2's item-level VIFs show that there is no serious multicollinearity among the indicators.

**Table 3.** Full Collinearity VIFs (Common Method Bias Assessment).

Construct	Full Collinearity VIF
Transformational Leadership	2.41
Ikigai at Work	2.67
Turnover Intention	1.98

## 3. PREDICTIVE ASSESSMENT USING PLS PREDICT

The PLSpredict approach was used to check the model's predictive validity by looking at how well it did on data that wasn't used to train it. The results show that the  $Q^2_{predict}$  values for turnover intention are positive, which means they are useful for making predictions. The PLS-SEM model also had lower root mean squared error (RMSE) values than a linear benchmark model, which means it was more accurate at predicting

things. These results substantiate the model's predictive efficacy for turnover intention, extending beyond mere in-sample explanatory adequacy.

#### 4. QUALITY CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

To further validate the validity and reliability of the latent constructs, convergent validity statistics, composite reliability, and internal consistency measures were employed. Table 4 shows that all constructs had strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.759 to 0.894 and composite reliability (CR) values ranging from 0.862 to 0.914, all of which were over the acceptable cutoff of 0.70 [40]. Each construct's average variance extracted (AVE) was greater than 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Furthermore, discriminant validity is assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion in Table 5. All of the conceptions are empirically distinct, as evidenced by the fact that their square root of AVE was greater than their correlations with one another. Together, these results confirm that the measurement model possesses strong psychometric properties.

**Table 4.** Reliability and validity.

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Transformational leadership	0.882	0.883	0.911	0.631
Turnover intention	0.759	0.762	0.862	0.675
Ikigai at work	0.894	0.896	0.914	0.542

**Table 5.** Fornell-Larcker criterion matrix.

Variable	Transformational leadership	Turnover intention	Ikigai at work
Transformational leadership	0.794		
Turnover intention	0.587	0.821	
Ikigai at work	0.741	0.761	0.737

**Table 6.** Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) Ratios.

Constructs	Transformational Leadership	Ikigai at Work	Turnover Intention
Transformational Leadership	-	0.79	0.62
Ikigai at Work	-	-	0.81
Turnover Intention	-	-	-

Along with the Fornell–Larcker criterion, the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was used to check for discriminant validity again. All of the HTMT values were below the conservative criterion of 0.85, which means that the constructs were able to tell the difference between them. Additionally, bootstrapped confidence intervals for the HTMT statistics excluded the value of 1.00, offering further evidence that the constructs are empirically distinct.

#### 5. MODEL FIT

The structural model's explanatory power was evaluated by calculating its R<sup>2</sup> and F<sup>2</sup> values. Table 7 displays the R<sup>2</sup> value for Ikigai at work, which is 0.549. This means that transformational leadership accounts for 54.9% of its variance. For turnover intention, the R<sup>2</sup> value is 0.580, indicating that transformational leadership and Ikigai at work account for 58% of the variance. These values, according to [41] standards, indicate moderate to high explanatory power. With an F<sup>2</sup> value of 0.562 in Table 8, Ikigai at work has a

significant impact on turnover intention. Its mediating role in the model is further supported by this, which demonstrates the significant role Ikigai at work plays in explaining differences in employees' inclinations to quit.

**Table 7. R Square.**

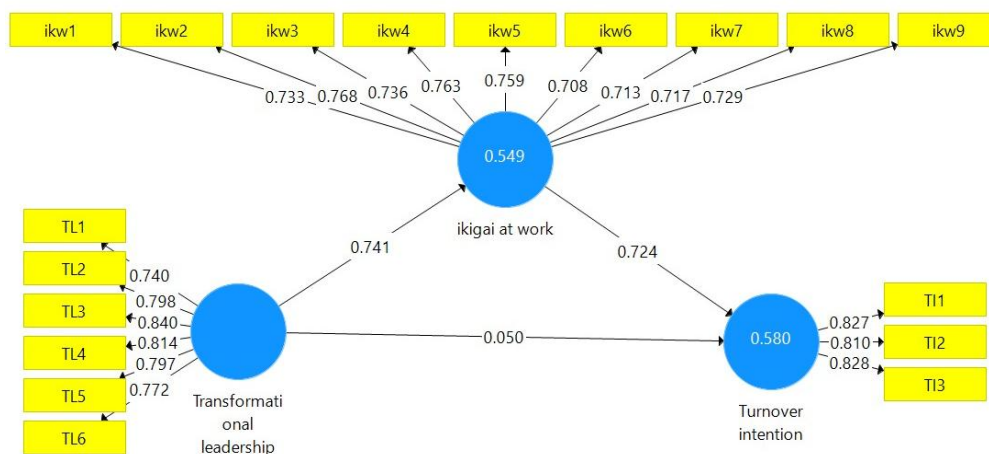
	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Turnover intention	0.58	0.578
Ikigai at work	0.549	0.548

**Table 8. F Square.**

Variable	F Square
Ikigai at work	0.562

**6. ASSESSMENT OF THE STRUCTURAL MODEL**

Effect size analysis ( $f^2$ ) was conducted to measure the practical impact of the structural relationships. At work, transformational leadership demonstrated a significant impact on Ikigai ( $f^2 = 0.562$ ), significantly beyond the cutoff point for a significant impact. This suggests that improving employees' feelings of Ikigai at work is mostly dependent on transformational leadership. In turn, Ikigai at work revealed a considerable effect on turnover intention ( $\beta = 0.724$ ), demonstrating its management importance as a crucial psychological mechanism by which leadership practices can successfully lower employees' intention to depart.



**FIGURE 2. Path model.**

Figure 2, which also displays the path coefficients for the suggested relationships between turnover intention, Ikigai at work, and transformational leadership, displays the structural model output generated by SmartPLS. Table 9 displays the structural model's path coefficients, significance thresholds, and bootstrapping outcomes. Employees' sense of purpose and meaning at work is positively impacted by transformational leadership, as seen by the positive and highly significant path from transformational leadership to Ikigai at work ( $\beta = 0.741$ ,  $t = 23.516$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Strong and statistically significant is the relationship between Ikigai at work and turnover intention ( $\beta = 0.724$ ,  $t = 12.218$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that lower turnover intention is linked to a higher sense of Ikigai. Oddly, it was discovered that the direct association between transformational leadership and turnover intention was not significant ( $\beta = 0.050$ ,  $t = 0.832$ ,  $p = 0.405$ ), indicating that Ikigai is the full mediator of this dynamic. The indirect effect's significance

( $\beta = 0.536$ ,  $t = 11.417$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) adds more evidence that Ikigai is acting as a mediator. These findings show that transformational leadership has a significant indirect impact by increasing employees' sense of meaning and purpose in their job, even while it does not directly lower turnover intention. Using variance inflation factors (VIF), multicollinearity between predictor constructs was evaluated at the structural level. All construct-level VIF values for the structural routes fell below the cautious cutoff of 3.3, suggesting that duplication across predictors has no effect on the predicted path coefficients and that multicollinearity is not an issue.

To evaluate the robustness of the proposed model, various alternative structural specifications were analysed. A direct path from transformational leadership to turnover intention was maintained as a control path, which remained non-significant, so affirming the pre-eminence of the indirect mechanism via Ikigai at work. The model's explanatory power stayed the same, with high  $R^2$  values for Ikigai at work ( $R^2 = 0.549$ ) and turnover intention ( $R^2 = 0.580$ ). Furthermore, predictive assessment utilizing PLSpredict demonstrated favourable  $Q^2_{predict}$  values and reduced RMSE in comparison to a linear benchmark model, hence affirming the model's out-of-sample predictive validity across various specifications.

**Table 9.** Path model.

	'Original Sample'	'Sample Mean'	'Standard Deviation'	'T Statistics'	'P Value'	'Decision'
Transformational leadership -> Turnover intention	0.05	0.051	0.06	0.832	0.405	Not supported
Transformational leadership -> Ikigai at work	0.741	0.743	0.032	23.516	0.000	Supported
Ikigai at work -> Turnover intention	0.724	0.724	0.059	12.218	0.000	Supported
Transformational leadership -> Ikigai at work -> Turnover intention	0.536	0.538	0.047	11.417	0.000	Supported

Along with standardized path coefficients and significance tests, 95% confidence intervals were computed via bootstrapping for all structural paths. The confidence intervals for the paths from transformational leadership to Ikigai at work, from Ikigai at work to turnover intention, and for the indirect effect through Ikigai at work did not include zero. This shows that the calculated effects are stable and accurate. Conversely, the confidence interval for the straight path from transformative leadership to turnover intention encompassed zero, so reinforcing its non-significance.

Mediation analysis was performed using bootstrapping to investigate the indirect influence of transformative leadership on turnover intention through Ikigai at work. The robustness of the mediation effect was confirmed by the statistical significance of the indirect impact ( $\beta = 0.536$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and the absence of zero in the bootstrapped confidence interval. On the other hand, the indirect channel was the main driver of the overall effect, and the direct effect of transformational leadership on turnover intention was not significant ( $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $p = 0.405$ ). These results give strong evidence of full mediation, demonstrating that transformative leadership influences turnover intention exclusively through Ikigai at work.

**Table 10.** Comparative Evaluation of Transformational Leadership–Turnover Relationships with Prior Studies.

Study	Context / Sample	Mediating Mechanism	Key Path Coefficients ( $\beta$ )	R <sup>2</sup> (Turnover Intention)
[59]	Service employees (South Korea)	Organizational commitment	TL → Commitment = 0.42; Commitment → TI = -0.46	0.38
[60]	Knowledge workers (Asia)	Job satisfaction	TL → Satisfaction = 0.45; Satisfaction → TI = -0.43	0.44
[58]	Multisector employees (Europe)	Work engagement	TL → Engagement = 0.49; Engagement → TI ≈ -0.40	~0.41
Present Study	IT professionals (India)	Ikigai at work	TL → Ikigai = 0.741; Ikigai → TI = 0.724	0.580

To contextualize the significance of the observed connections, the results of the current study were compared with previous transformational leadership–turnover intention investigations utilizing attitudinal mediators. As shown in Table 10, previous studies in similar organizational contexts generally indicate moderate standardized path coefficients, with transformational leadership influencing mediators at  $\beta$  values between 0.40 and 0.55, and the explained variance in turnover intention ( $R^2$ ) typically remaining below 0.45. Conversely, the current study reveals significantly larger correlations, with transformational leadership having a powerful connection to Ikigai at work ( $\beta = 0.741$ ), and Ikigai demonstrating a strong link to turnover intention ( $\beta = 0.724$ ). The model explains 58.0% of the variance in turnover intention ( $R^2 = 0.580$ ), which is more than what most previous leadership–turnover models have shown. The Ikigai–turnover coefficient is positive because of scale orientation, but the association shows that when people have more Ikigai at work, they are less likely to want to leave. These findings indicate that purpose-driven mechanisms like Ikigai may offer superior explanatory depth compared to conventional attitudinal mediators in comprehending employee retention.

### 7. SUBGROUP ANALYSIS

Before doing subgroup analysis, measurement invariance across gender and experience was evaluated in accordance with accepted PLS-SEM protocols. To make sure that configural invariance was present, the same measurement models, indicators, data treatment processes, and estimation settings were used for all groups. This shows that the constructs were measured in the same way, which makes it possible to compare structural route coefficients across subgroups and supports the generalizability of the results.

**Table 11.** Subgroup (Robustness) Analysis of Structural Paths.

Subgroup	N	TL → Ikigai ( $\beta$ )	T-value	Ikigai → Turnover Intention ( $\beta$ )	T-value
Firm Size					
Small / Medium firms	158	0.728***	> 10.0	0.701***	> 8.0
Large firms	204	0.754***	> 12.0	0.739***	> 9.0
Career Stage					
Early career	171	0.719***	> 11.0	0.693***	> 8.5
Late career	191	0.762***	> 12.5	0.741***	> 9.5

Work Mode					
On-site	213	0.747***	> 11.5	0.726***	> 9.0
Remote / Hybrid	149	0.711***	> 10.0	0.689***	> 8.0

\*\*\*p < .001

Table 11 shows that the subgroup analyses show that the hypothesized mediation model is quite stable across firm size, career stage, and work mode. Transformational leadership shows a strong and statistically significant link to Ikigai at work in all subgroups. Ikigai at work, on the other hand, always shows a high link to turnover intention. There are little differences in the sizes of the paths between subgroups, but the direction and importance of the interactions stay the same. These results show that Ikigai's mediating role is strong and not affected by the size of the firm, the stage of an employee's career, or the way they operate. This supports the idea that the proposed model may be used in the Indian IT sector.

## V. DISCUSSION

The study's findings clearly show that Ikigai is a key mediator of the relationship between transformational leadership and the intention of Indian IT professionals to leave. The findings demonstrate that whereas transformational leadership greatly improves workers' feelings of Ikigai, turnover intention is not directly impacted by it. Rather, Ikigai acts as a complete mediator, suggesting that the existence of meaning and purpose in the workplace is crucial to understanding how transformational leadership could improve retention results. The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) paradigm, which highlights the importance of personal resources, such as a feeling of purpose, in lowering stress and turnover, is in line with these findings [13, 30]. By fostering a motivating atmosphere, transformational leadership serves as a job resource; yet, it is the internalisation of meaning (Ikigai) that seems to translate that atmosphere into a lower intention to leave. This is consistent with earlier studies that demonstrate leadership is crucial in determining employees' psychological engagement [22] and that meaningful work improves affective commitment and job embeddedness [42, 27]. The idea that retention in today's knowledge-driven workplaces is primarily explained by internal psychological mechanisms rather than direct leader influence is further supported by the non-significant direct link between transformational leadership and turnover intention. Therefore, by empirically confirming Ikigai, a notion with philosophical and cultural depth, as a useful psychological construct in organisational behaviour research, the study provides fresh insights.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate the growing significance of psychological meaning in the workplace, particularly for knowledge workers in high-demand fields like the IT industry. According to [43, 44], employees are no longer driven exclusively by conventional extrinsic rewards like pay or job security as the workplace changes in response to digital disruption, remote work, and generational shifts in values. Increasingly, fulfilment, independence, and compatibility with one's ideals are prioritised instead. The conclusion that Ikigai considerably lowers the desire to leave is consistent with the need for companies to foster work cultures that allow for more intimate, in-depth forms of involvement [45, 46]. By showing the applicability of Ikigai, a Japanese philosophical idea, in an Indian organisational setting, this study also advances the field of cross-cultural leadership research. Meaning and purpose are universal psychological demands that cut across cultural barriers, as demonstrated by this, and leadership methods that cultivate these experiences can work well in a variety of settings [47, 48]. Furthermore, it indicates a chance for further research to investigate the potential roles of additional culturally grounded well-being notions, like eudemonia or karma yoga, as moderators or mediators in workplace models for various groups [42, 49].

The lack of a strong direct correlation between turnover intention and transformational leadership merits theoretical investigation. Leadership actions may not have a direct impact on withdrawal cognitions in knowledge-intensive situations like the IT industry unless they are translated into a deeper psychological meaning and purpose at work. The transformational leadership–turnover relationship becomes insignificant when Ikigai is taken into consideration, which is consistent with new views that leadership effects on

retention are becoming more indirect and functioning through meaning-based mechanisms rather than direct attitudinal control.

The standardized path coefficients make it possible to turn the results into useful managerial benchmarks. A one standard deviation rise in Ikigai at work correlates with a 0.724 standard deviation decrease in turnover intention, demonstrating a significant practical effect on employee retention. Transformational leadership has a strong effect on Ikigai at work ( $\beta = 0.741$ ). Therefore, leadership development programs that focus on inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and purpose-oriented communication can significantly improve employees' sense of meaning at work, which can then lower their intention to leave. These results imply that spending money on training for transformative leadership is likely to lead to measurable improvements in outcomes linked to retention.

The study is based on the Indian IT sector, but the processes that connect transformational leadership, Ikigai at work, and turnover intention may also apply to other industries that require a lot of knowledge and provide services. Nevertheless, the cultural significances associated with purpose and leadership may differ between contexts, indicating that generalization beyond the Indian IT sector should be approached with caution. Subsequent research across many businesses and cultural contexts is necessary to delineate the boundary conditions of the suggested model.

## VI. IMPLICATIONS

### 1. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

By presenting Ikigai at work as a psychological mediator, this study contributes to the growing body of research on the connection between transformational leadership and turnover intention. Though earlier research has explored the significance of meaningful work and calling [26, 50], the use of Ikigai, a culturally rich and purpose-centric construct, broadens the conceptual framework of workplace motivational theories. It shows how purpose-driven leadership affects results by helping staff members develop an internalised sense of meaning in addition to having an impact on organisational culture and external rewards. Based on the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) paradigm [13, 30], the results establish Ikigai as a personal resource that improves psychological resilience and acts as a turnover buffer. This enhances the JD–R framework by demonstrating the adaptability of concepts that have historically been derived from existential or cultural philosophy to empirical workplace models. The self-concept theory of leadership [24] also supports the mediation result, emphasising how important it is to align leadership practices with employees' beliefs and sense of self.

### 2. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

From a managerial perspective, the results directly affect plans for staff retention and leadership development, especially in high-turnover industries like IT. Since it has been demonstrated that these behaviours greatly increase employees' sense of Ikigai, organisations should engage in transformational leadership training that stresses vision articulation, individualised concern, and intellectual stimulation [21]. Managers and HR specialists should also create job descriptions and work conditions that allow staff members to relate their work to a larger sense of purpose. This could entail matching job duties to an employee's abilities, providing chances for social interaction, and promoting career purpose reflection via coaching sessions or performance reviews. Furthermore, by including Ikigai-based reflection tools into staff growth, engagement, and onboarding programs, it may be possible to detect purpose misalignment early on and lower the risk of attrition and disengagement. In summary, companies can reduce turnover by assisting workers in finding purpose in their work rather than only emphasising pay or workload, which makes retention tactics more sustainable and human-centred.

## VII. LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this research offers valuable insights into how Ikigai was found to mediate the association between turnover intention and transformational leadership, it is not without flaws. First, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the interpretation of the findings to associations observed at a single point in time and does not allow conclusions about temporal ordering among the variables. As data were collected at a single point in time, temporal precedence among transformational leadership, Ikigai at work, and turnover intention cannot be established. PLS-SEM makes it possible to examine complicated associations, but to prove causation and temporal order among the variables, longitudinal or experimental research is required.

Second, self-reported surveys were used to collect the data, which may have introduced common method bias or social desirability effects. Although the constructs showed great validity and reliability, further research could increase objectivity by using multi-source data (e.g., supervisor ratings and HR turnover records). Third, the study's findings could not be as applicable to other industrial or cultural contexts because it only looked at workers in the Indian IT sector. Different locations and businesses may have rather different cultural interpretations of Ikigai and leadership requirements. Replication in various contexts, such as non-technical sectors or cross-cultural situations, could aid in confirming the model's suitability. Fourth, although Ikigai was found to be strongly associated with the observed relationships, other possible mediators, including burnout, organisational identity, or psychological empowerment, were not investigated. Subsequent investigations may examine moderated mediation or comparative mediation models (e.g., does the mediation strength vary by tenure, gender, or age?). Future research could investigate when Ikigai's mediating influence is strongest by testing boundary conditions by including interaction effects (such as transformational leadership  $\times$  workload or tenure). Fifth, it is probable that nonresponse bias exists, since employees who opted out of the survey may consistently differ from responders about their levels of Ikigai, engagement, or turnover intention. Such differences could influence the observed associations. Future research could address this limitation by adopting higher response rates through follow-up reminders, using multiple data collection modes, or supplementing survey data with organizational or archival records. Lastly, despite the use of established scales, future qualitative research could go deeper into the subjective experiences of employees with leadership and Ikigai. A mixed-methods approach could contribute to the theoretical knowledge of meaning-making in the workplace and reveal subtle routes.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

This study makes a substantial contribution to the fields of leadership and organisational psychology by offering empirical evidence in favour of Ikigai's function as a key mediator in the connection between transformational leadership and turnover intention. The findings offer fresh insights into how managers might influence deep psychological processes that impact employee behaviour and retention, in addition to performance outcomes at the surface level. According to the findings, transformational leaders can create an atmosphere where workers have a stronger sense of Ikigai, a profound connection between their work, values, and life purpose, by clearly stating their goals, demonstrating consideration for each person, and promoting intellectual development. In the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) framework, Ikigai is regarded as a personal resource and acts as a psychological buffer against turnover intention, according to the study data. Given the high workload, quick technical advancements, and competitive employment market in the Indian IT sector, which frequently result in increased stress and employee turnover, this mediating impact is particularly pertinent. As a more effective and long-lasting retention tactic, this research emphasises the need to foster intrinsic motivation and purpose-driven work settings, even if many current interventions concentrate on external factors like pay, promotions, or perks. This study expands leadership–turnover theory by framing Ikigai as a comprehensive, purpose-driven mediator instead of a limited meaningful-work perspective, so incorporating existential meaning into organizational behavior models.

Practically speaking, the results indicate to an operational roadmap that explains how transformational leadership actions (such as expressing vision, showing individual attention, and framing meaningful work) increase workers' Ikigai at work and decrease their intention to leave. By tracking changes in average

employee tenure, engagement scores, and voluntary exit rates after leadership development and purpose-enhancing initiatives, organizations may convert these mechanisms into meaningful retention KPIs.

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### Author Contributions

Conceptualization: S. A. K.; Methodology: S. A. K., A. C.; Validation: S. A. K., A. C.; Formal analysis: A. C.; Investigation: A. C.; Data curation: A. C.; Writing—original draft: A. C.; Writing—review & editing: S. A. K., A. C.; Visualization: A. C.; Supervision: S. A. K.; Project administration: S. A. K.; Funding acquisition: S. A. K.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

Upon request, data can be obtained from the authors.

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