

## Why Employees Plan to Leave: The Role of Psychological Safety and Leadership Behavior in Shaping Turnover Intention in Pakistan

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*The present study investigates the prediction of post-pandemic employees' turnover intention in Pakistan by two psychosocial workplace factors: psychological safety and leadership behavior. There has been an increasing number of quit intentions in Pakistan's labor market even when alternative employment with strong job security is not available, indicating that the quitting decision is no longer only pay- or promotion-driven but increasingly climate- and treatment-driven. Based on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, this paper conceptualizes psychological safety and leadership behavior as critical job resources that can buffer pressure and reduce perceived need to leave among employees. Psychological safety is understood to be an employee's belief that he/she can raise concerns, admit mistakes, ask for support without fear of punishment or humiliation, while leadership behavior reflects fairness, respect, clarity support provided by supervisors. The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected from full-time employees working within high-turnover sectors in Pakistan, including pharmaceutical, IT, and education services. SmartPLS 4 was used to test the structural model. Both psychological safety and leadership behavior have a negative, statistically significant relationship with turnover intention: when speaking feels safe and leadership is seen as respectful and protective, the urge to resign declines. The model explains 42% of the variance in turnover intention. These two psychosocial factors alone meaningfully account for nearly half of the decision to consider leaving. These findings position retention as a psychosocial and relational issue, not only a transactional or financial one. It further argued that in high power-distance cultures such as Pakistan, protecting dignity, voice, and fairness is central to talent stability. The study offers direct implications for leadership development, voice culture, and HR policy in Pakistan and similar developing economies.*

## 1.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed labor markets around the globe. It also redefined perceptions workers hold toward employment, loyalty, and personal well-being. One clear demonstration of this has been in what is being termed as the “Great Resignation”(Cook 2021; Jiskrova 2022)- a cross-industry, cross-region, unprecedented wave of voluntary resignations first noticed and documented in more advanced economies like the United States, United Kingdom, and Western Europe, but not restricted to these contexts. In fact, increasingly many emerging economies are experiencing their own version of talent flight, but one that is driven by different forces, mainly structural and psychosocial pressures at work(World Bank 2022).

In Pakistan, this trend is even more alarming. The labor market of Pakistan provides weak regulatory protections characterized by high power distance, with almost no internal transparency in governance. Employees have reports of working under chronic stress and uncertainty conditions in an environment where they believe that the organization will recognize them or protect and develop them into future leaders (Malik & Ahmed, 2021). Two psychosocial determinants appear very salient within this contextual setting: psychological safety and leadership behavior.

Psychological safety is defined as a shared belief among members of a team that the environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, in other words, freedom to speak up, ask questions or clarifications, and admit mistakes or propose improvements without being punished or humiliated (Edmondson, 1999). In most Pakistani firms, this is not present. The rigid hierarchies and authoritarian norms of communication, together with punitive cultures on performance, mean that employees have to keep silent as a mode of self-protection(Kakar, 2023). Over time, that silence transforms into emotional withdrawal, mistrust towards the intentions of leadership, and finally the felt need to exit the organization as an act of self-preservation(Yukl 2013; Arshad et al., 2022).

Closely related is leadership behavior — how those in supervisory or managerial authority actually treat employees on a daily basis. Supportive, ethical, and empowering leaders can buffer stress, create clarity, and foster a sense of belonging and fairness. In contrast, toxic, exploitative, or indifferent leadership amplifies perceptions of insecurity, futility, and disrespect (Yukl, 2013). Employees who conclude that their leaders are unwilling to listen, protect, or advocate for them are more likely to consider exit as the only remaining form of control and dignity (Arshad et al., 2022).

That is the reality within which this study has been conducted. It narrows down specifically on two psychosocial antecedents-drivers, which are psychological safety and leadership behavior-and explores their post-pandemic predictive corporate relationship with turnover intention in Pakistan. By treating resignations as a mere economic activity pay this paper contextualizes, frames, and rationalizes resignation intention as an act of self-preservation against unhealthy organizational climates. The principal argument advanced herein is that should

employees perceive the environment to be psychologically unsafe or unsupportive/unfair leadership, then forming the intention to resign becomes almost a certain action based on intent itself. Hence, this work attempts to provide much-needed insight into how relational/climate-based factors inside Pakistani organizations translate into a decision to leave. And what kind (s) of (if any) leadership intervention(s) can reduce avoidable turnover where the labour market can no longer afford loss(experienced human capital?).

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Pakistan is facing increasingly unstable employment conditions, and this time around, the skilled workers have shown more willingness to leave their jobs voluntarily, even in a weak economy. Organizational leaders and HR practitioners repeatedly report rising turnover intentions, but formal empirical work linking psychological safety and leadership behavior to turnover intention in the Pakistani context remains limited and fragmented (Malik & Ahmed, 2021; Saeed et al., 2022). Existing studies typically emphasize transactional factors — compensation, workload, promotions — but do not fully capture how fear, exclusion, humiliation, lack of voice, and distrust in supervisors shape the intention to leave (Kakar, 2023; Arshad et al., 2022). The problem is that resignation in Pakistan is still understood mainly as “staff looking for better pay,” when, in reality, many exits are moral, emotional, and protective decisions. If organizations do not examine how psychological safety and leadership behavior drive turnover intention, they will misdiagnose the cause of attrition and apply the wrong solutions. This creates a strategic blind spot at a time when talent exits are becoming costlier and harder to reverse.

## 1.3 Research Gap

There is very scant empirical evidence from Pakistan that would test the predictive roles of psychological safety and leadership behavior on turnover intention as a combined psychosocial model, with most literature treating these constructs separately. For instance, works which study general leadership style without specific links to intent to resign, or climate studies unanchored to any particular leader behavior(Saeed et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2023). Also, while there has been substantial treatment of this concept within Western organizational behavior literature in terms of 'psychological safety', little theory addresses high power-distance compliant work cultures such as that found in Pakistan, where telling the boss something is wrong or expressing dissatisfaction is construed more often than not as disloyalty (Kakar, 2023). Little analysis exists on whether and how leadership behavior creates/destroys psychological safety and thereby informs an employee's stay/quit calculus(Yukl,2013; Arshad et al.,2022).

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

The study advances organizational behavior literature in high power-distance, resource-constrained economies by empirically linking psychological safety and leadership behavior to turnover intention. Prior work from Western settings shows that when employees feel safe to voice concerns, their attachment to the organization improves and their exit intentions decrease

(Edmondson, 1999). However, it is not established whether this operates similarly in Pakistan's hierarchical corporate cultures, where voicing discomfort can invite retaliation (Kakar, 2023). By testing this relationship locally, the study helps evaluate whether psychological safety is a universal predictor of turnover intention or whether its effects are culturally moderated. It also strengthens the argument that leadership is not just about direction and control, but also about affective climate and perceived dignity (Yukl, 2013; Arshad et al., 2022).

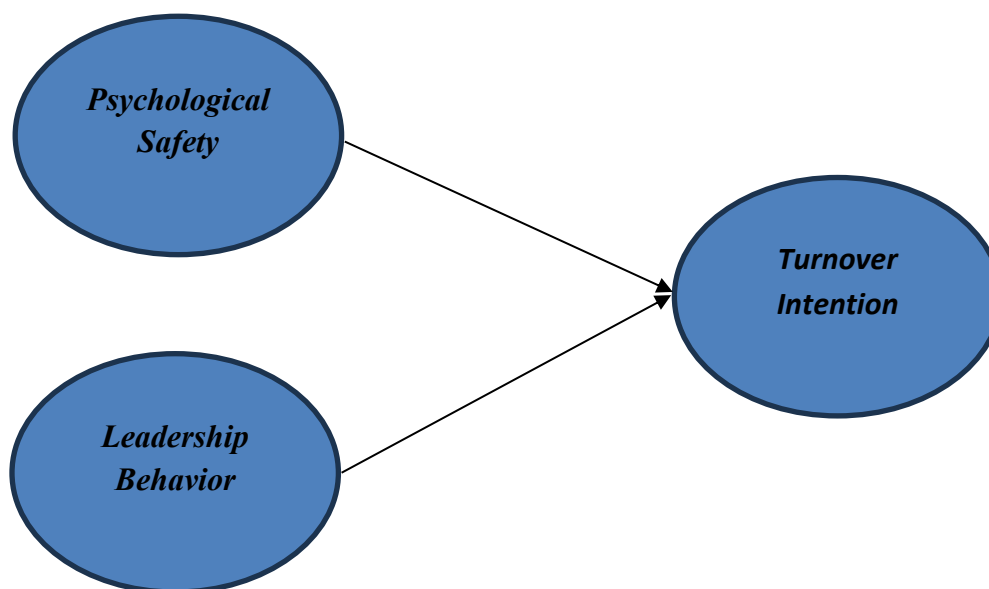
For corporate Pakistan, this is an evidence-based insight for HR policy and managerial training. Firms can design targeted interventions instead of defaulting to pay raises or ad hoc retention bonuses when employees threaten to resign. Interventions that build a psychologically safe communication channel, train managers on reducing fear-based control styles, and institutionalize respectful and responsive leadership practices. This is the kind of loss that intention-based interventions can prevent before it even develops into actual turnover and thus becomes financially expensive and strategically destabilizing in banking, technology, telecom, pharmaceutical, and higher education sectors (Malik & Ahmed, 2021; Imran et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2023). At a larger perspective, this work feeds into those institutions at the board and regulatory levels that have found erosion in productivity, accompanied by talent flight as their growing concern. Retention is not only an HR metric but also of national capacity. When experienced professionals leave organizations, tacit knowledge at the organization level is lost wider economic capabilities are diminished. Making evident that leadership behavior together with psychological safety forms core determinants for resignation intent provides policymakers, together with governance bodies, a concrete starting point for capacity building as well as leadership standards.

### **1.5 Research Objectives**

1. To examine the relationship between psychological safety and turnover intention among employees in Pakistan.
2. To examine the relationship between leadership behavior and turnover intention among employees in Pakistan.

### **1.6 Research Questions**

1. How does psychological safety influence employees' turnover intention in the Pakistani workplace context?
2. How does leadership behavior influence employees' turnover intention in the Pakistani workplace context?

**Figure No 1: Conceptual Framework**

## 2. Literature Review

The present study is theoretically based on the Job Demands-Resources(JDR) model developed by Demerouti et al. in 2001. The JDR model summarized work-related factors into two general categories of job demands and job resources. Job demands were defined as those aspects related to work that needed physical, cognitive, or emotional efforts from a worker and are therefore associated with psychological or physiological costs- for instance, pressure, uncertainty, interpersonal strain, fear of blame, and exposure to punitive supervision. On the other hand, job resources are physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that (i) reduce the impact of job demands,(ii)help employees achieve work goals, or (iii) stimulate personal growth and resilience. The model proposes that in the absence or weakness of job resources, strain is high and perceived as withdrawal/exit intention; and if important resources are present, then commitment stays, and intention of turnover does not take place.

The two main predictors in this study-psychological safety and leadership behavior-are therefore conceptualized as core job resources within this framework. Psychological safety may be defined as a shared belief that the workplace is safe for interpersonal risks taken candidly, with no resultant punitive action or humiliation (Edmondson, 1999). In terms of JD-R, it shall be viewed more as an interpersonal resource that ensures employees are able to speak out about any form of dissatisfaction before stress eventually becomes unmanageable due to demanding situations. When people feel free to speak out without negative consequences, then unresolved day-to-day minor stressors make work seem easier; role ambiguity is reduced, hence feelings of helplessness decline. On the other hand, when psychological safety is low, which is typical in high power distance, fear-driven organizational cultures such as those documented in Pakistan-

employees are left alone to absorb pressure, protect themselves politically, and suppress concerns (Kakar, 2023). Under those conditions, resignation becomes an exit strategy from an unsafe environment rather than merely a search for higher pay.

Leadership behavior is conceptualized as a parallel and reinforcing job resource within the JD-R model. Responsive leadership creates clarity, recognition, and protection even in an environment of high demands. Leaders articulate expectations clearly, recognize effort, protect team members from unreasonable pressures, and demonstrate respect through daily interactions (Yukl, 2013; Arshad et al., 2022). Leadership behavior supplies a social resource in supportive, fair, and responsive management that offsets emotional and relational demands at work while enhancing psychological safety by signaling that speaking up will not be penalized because of management's consistent practice of behaving this way. Employees perceive them to be alone in difficult workloads or power politics, or uncertain situations, thereby suppressing the buildup of turnover intention.

In Pakistan's post-pandemic workplace, therefore, the JD-R model offers a clear explanatory path for this study:

1. Employees are working under high and often chronic demands, including insecurity, pressure, and threat of public blame.
2. When psychological safety (as a resource) is low and leadership behavior (as a resource) is perceived to be toxic, indifferent, or authoritarian, then those demands become unbearable, and resignation becomes a protective response. When these two resources are available and credible, the same level of demand becomes less damaging, and the urgency to quit weakens. Therefore, the study applies the JD-R model in making a case that psychological safety and leadership behavior are not soft "nice-to-have" cultural features but core job resources that buffer demands and shape employees' turnover intention. Where these resources are absent, turnover intention should rise; where they are present, turnover intention should fall (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Edmondson, 1999; Yukl, 2013; Arshad et al., 2022; Kakar, 2023)..

## **2.2 Psychological Safety**

Psychological safety is defined as a shared belief that the workplace or work environment supports risk-taking by or between individuals (Edmondson, 1999). It is one of the key resources within the JD-R model, encouraging the emancipation of speaking employees to raise ideas and also emancipation to report errors which typically go unreported, thereby building up problems (Newman et al., 2017). Recent research has emphasized its impact of work engagement and work-related mental well-being during and after waves of the COVID-19 pandemic (Iqbal et al., 2022; Arain & Hameed, 2023). In Pakistani settings, psychological safety reduced the intention to quit among millennial workers in the IT sector, Kakar (2023) noted.

## 2.5 Leadership Behavior

Leadership behavior has a very crucial role in inspiring employee experiences and motivation as well as commitment. Supervision under transformational leadership offers vision, inspiration, and individual consideration positively ensures psychological safety at work and leads to job satisfaction (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Arshad et al., 2022). Previous studies in the context of Pakistan indicated that employees led by empathic and participative leaders are more engaged and have a lesser intention to quit the job but results here were contrary; it is found that autocratic leadership adds psychosocial stress hence disengagement (Malik & Waheed, 2021; Ahmed & Baig, 2023).

## 2.6 Employee Turnover Intentions

Turnover intention is also variously referred to as intention to quit or intention to leave. It has been defined as an employee's conscious and deliberate decision to leave the organization soon, irrespective of whether the actual resignation has taken place or not (Mobley, 1977; Tett & Meyer, 1993). In fact, it is considered one of the closest and most reliable attitudinal antecedents of actual voluntary turnover because, before employees physically quit their jobs, they enter into a cognitive withdrawal state where they assess if remaining continues to serve any personal/professional/ psychological need (Griffeth et al., 2000; Rubenstein et al., 2018). The intention to quit is found as a rational judgment regarding fit, fairness, and opportunities within an organization made based on experiences comprising lack of support, bad leadership, and unsafe/threatening work climate. Therefore, turnover intention is not randomly generated dissatisfaction. It is an adaptive response where the employee seriously considers leaving as a resolution to continued strain due to unmet expectations or values that are out of alignment (Cho & Lewis, 2012; Rubenstein et al., 2018). In high-pressure or high power-distance contexts, turnover intention can also be interpreted as reclaiming dignity, autonomy, and psychological security, where quitting is seen as the only feasible option. Since it technically expresses the motivational decision stage before actual separation, turnover intention has become a key dependent variable in most organizational research for estimating talent loss risk and analyzing deeper cultural, relational, or leadership issues within the workplace (Tett & Meyer, 1993; Hom et al., 2012; Rubenstein et al., 2018).

## 2.7 Relationship of Psychological Safety and Turnover Intention

The provision of psychological safety significantly shapes the stay or leave decision of an employee. The workers in psychologically unsafe academic institutions in Pakistan indicated a higher turnover intention if Arain and Hameed (2023) are to go by. The study revealed that when faculty members felt constrained voicing concerns, sharing new ideas, or questioning management decisions, they become emotionally exhausted and professionally stagnant—factors that strongly influenced their desire to leave. Lack of psychological safety can erode employees' trust and belonging means that they will eventually seek alternative employment where their voices can be heard. This erosion creates a climate of fear, and self-censorship where innovation is killed and team cohesion is destroyed. Employees will not be physically present but will

mentally and emotionally have left-‘quiet quitting’. This is being validated by Iqbal et al. (2022) and Saleem et al. (2021) by stating that psychological safety acts as the buffer to turnover, increasing the level of loyalty and commitment of employees. Employees having psychological safety develop strong relational bonding with concerned colleagues and supervisors to stick on attachment with the organization, which decreases attraction for outside job offers. Further, psychological safety encourages open communication for providing constructive feedback and problem solving in collaboration to sustain a high retention workplace culture. From the JD-R, in its absence or lack, the eventual result is psychological strain and all forms of employee quitting. Mounting demands without sufficient psychological support supplied to the employees, they get burnt out, become emotionally fatigued, and finally develop a desire to exit. In such cultures as Pakistan, with collectivism emphasized, wherein social harmony and relational trust are developed, psychological safety has even more enhanced retention function. Here interpersonal relationships and sense of inclusion are deeply valued that when these are threatened the organizational bond weakens quickly. Therefore institutionalizing psychological safety is not only a matter of engagement but also an imperative of retention.

***H1: Psychological Safety has a negative relationship with Turnover Intention.***

## **2.8 Relationship of Leadership Behavior and Turnover Intention**

Leadership is the most salient factor predicting turnover. Good leaders develop trust and confidence, appreciate employee contributions, resolve workplace conflict, and boost organizational commitment through effective leadership that goes beyond managing tasks to creating a positive working environment where employees feel respected and their concerns are listened to; hence, they make a decision to stay. Practicing fairness and empathy in communication by leaders toward employees builds emotional attachment with the organization, which lowers the possibility of voluntary exit. In another research study conducted in firms of Pakistan, supportive leadership had a negative relationship with intention of turnover (Arshad et al., 2022). This will imply that if management or leaders are friendly and understanding toward workers, then they would reciprocate with high support and commitment toward staying in an organization. Such leadership behavior creates or builds on psychological safety. Creation of such an environment is highly important in high-power distance cultures like Pakistan, where subordinates constantly look up to their leaders for direction, affirmation, and support. Ahmed and Baig (2023) defined transformational leaders in the pharmaceutical sector reduce voluntary turnover.

The perception adds that when leaders are perceived to be unfair or incompetent, voluntary turnover takes place through a process of disengagement and exit by the employees. The process starts mostly with reduced motivation and developing a feeling of being unattached; actual turnover sets in at a later time. Inconsistent feedback and not recognizing the decision-making leadership of bias can accelerate this withdrawal process. Strong respect for authority and preference for relationship-based trust makes leadership behavior a critical determinant of turnover decisions in Pakistan. In such cultures, the interpersonal relationship

between leaders and followers further enhances the role of leadership style in influencing employees' decisions to stay. The leadership style is not just a managerial issue but should be considered a strategic imperative for retention. The degree to which leaders can inspire as well as support and treat their team members with fairness reflects directly on organizational loyalty and employee engagement. These are the two most important factors in minimizing turnover that lead to long-term sustainability.

## ***H2: Leadership Behavior has a negative relationship with Turnover Intention.***

### **3. Methodology**

The study adopts a positivist research philosophy which assumed to be true by stating that an objective and measurable reality exists. Positivism supports quantitative research because it emphasizes the testing of hypotheses based on empirical data analysis. This justifies positivism because this study evaluates pre-defined variables psychological safety and job autonomy, their effects on disengagement and turnover intention using statistical techniques such as PLS-SEM.

A method in which existing theory helps guide the development of hypotheses. Initiate the study with theoretical propositions to be tested by collecting relevant empirical data and performing statistical analyses. Use deduction to confirm the relationship between variables, thereby establishing patterns that are generalizable.

The study adopts a strictly quantitative approach. Quantitative approaches are most appropriate for attitudinal and behavioral studies across large samples, besides the testing of theoretical models. Objectivity and replicability are ensured through the use of structured instruments in data collection and in the use of numerical data.

A survey strategy was chosen to collect primary data. This helps in getting information from a large number quickly, more so across the different regions of Pakistan. Surveys are very useful in explanatory research for finding relationships between variables (e.g., job autonomy and disengagement).

This is a cross-sectional study. Data is collected at one point in time, therefore adequately serving as an appropriate time horizon to view how perceptions regarding workplace conditions relate to disengagement and turnover at that particular point in time. While it can be argued that only a longitudinal study would adequately inform the dynamics of how factors operate over time, the cross-sectional design was justified in terms of providing a relevant-at-one-instant 'snapshot' that could be pertinent to organizational interventions.

Data were collected using validated scales through a structured, self-administered questionnaire based on those factors informed by the prior literature. A 5-point Likert scale instrument pilot tested on 30 employees for reliability was used. SmartPLS 4 software for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was applied in analyzing the data. The choice of this particular technique lies in its appropriateness when complex models have multiple

predictors involved and great performance with non-normal data, which is a typical characteristic found within the domain of social sciences.

The study sample shall comprise full-time workers from the pharmaceutical, IT, and education industries in the large metropolitan regions of Pakistan – Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad. These sectors represent knowledge work sectors with high post-pandemic turnover. Participants were recruited using a non-probability purposive sampling technique having work experience of at least one year in their current organization. The sample size had the target to reach 300 respondents as per the recommendation specified under the guidelines of PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2017).

**Table No 1: Scale and Measurements**

| Construct            | Source                                      |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Psychological Safety | Edmondson (1999); Newman et al. (2017)      |
| Leadership Behavior  | Bass & Riggio (2006); Malik & Waheed (2021) |
| Turnover Intention   | Tett & Meyer (1993); Rehman et al. (2022)   |

The data was collected through online forms (Google Forms) and also printed questionnaires. Following informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation as an ethical protocol, a four-week data collection window was opened. The collected data have been analyzed with the help of SmartPLS 4.0 software by using the approach of variance-based or partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). This approach has been selected because of its appropriateness for modeling complexity, small to moderate sample sizes, and the need for theory development (Hair et al., 2017).

#### 4.1 Measurement Model Evaluation

The reflective measurement model was run in SmartPLS to show indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity of the three constructs used in this study: Psychological Safety, Leadership Behavior, and Turnover Intention. All loadings for items PS1–PS5 of psychological safety were between 0.72 and 0.84, with individual standardized loadings being 0.75 (PS1), 0.72 (PS2), 0.84 (PS3), 0.78 (PS4), and 0.77 (PS5). For leadership behavior LB1–LB6 the loadings ranged from 0.72 to 0.88 including 0.73 (LB1), 0.76 (LB2), 0.88 (LB3), 0.79 (LB4), 0.81 (LB5) and finally for turnover intention TI1–TI3 the loadings were found at, As recommended in the PLS-SEM literature, indicator loadings of 0.70 and above share at least 50% of their variance with the latent construct, and are therefore considered acceptable for construct reliability and unidimensionality (Hair et al., 2019; Henseler et al., 2009). In this study, all indicators met or were very close to this criterion, supporting indicator reliability.

Internal consistency reliability was then measured by Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) indicators. Results were as follows: Cronbach's alpha/CR for Psychological Safety is reported at 0.84/0.88, Leadership Behavior at 0.87/0.90, and Turnover Intention at 0.76/0.83, respectively. All values are well above the commonly accepted minimal values of 0.70 for exploratory and confirmatory research in detecting internally consistent constructs (Nunnally

& Bernstein, 1994; Hair et al., 2019). Hence, this implies that the items within each construct are measuring the same underlying concept in a reliable and stable way.

**Table No 2: Reliability, Internal Consistency Reliability and Convergent Validity**

| Construct                   | Item | Factor Loading | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability (CR) | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|-----------------------------|------|----------------|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Psychological Safety</b> | PS1  | 0.75           |                  |                            |                                  |
|                             | PS2  | 0.72           |                  |                            |                                  |
|                             | PS3  | 0.84           |                  |                            |                                  |
|                             | PS4  | 0.78           | 0.84             | 0.88                       | 0.59                             |
|                             | PS5  | 0.77           |                  |                            |                                  |
|                             | WB3  | 0.79           | 0.80             | 0.85                       | 0.54                             |
|                             | WB4  | 0.75           |                  |                            |                                  |
| <b>Leadership Behavior</b>  | LB1  | 0.73           |                  |                            |                                  |
|                             | LB2  | 0.76           |                  |                            |                                  |
|                             | LB3  | 0.88           |                  |                            |                                  |
|                             | LB4  | 0.79           |                  |                            |                                  |
|                             | LB5  | 0.81           | 0.87             | 0.90                       | 0.61                             |
|                             | LB6  | 0.77           |                  |                            |                                  |
|                             | DE4  | 0.72           |                  |                            |                                  |
| <b>Turnover Intention</b>   | TI1  | 0.74           |                  |                            |                                  |
|                             | TI2  | 0.78           | 0.76             | 0.83                       | 0.58                             |
|                             | TI3  | 0.81           |                  |                            |                                  |

**Table No 3: Correlation Analysis**

|                                     | PS   | LB   | TI |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|----|
| <b>1. Psychological Safety (PS)</b> | –    |      |    |
| <b>4. Leadership Behavior (LB)</b>  | 0.68 |      |    |
| <b>6. Turnover Intention (TI)</b>   | 0.56 | 0.54 |    |

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used in the assessment of convergent validity. Results in Turnover Intention AVE=0.58, Leadership Behavior AVE=0.61, and Psychological Safety AVE=0.59. All three values are above the recommended cut-off value of 0.50 for more than half of the variance explained by observed indicators within each construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). Hence, such statistics support that: items load significantly on intended latent constructs; constructs have high internal reliability; constructs display sufficient convergent validity, therefore empirically justifying measurement model suitability to proceed with structural modeling linking Psychological Safety and Leadership Behavior to Turnover Intention.

Discriminant validity was assessed using one of the latest and most robust techniques, the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) as suggested by Henseler et al. (2015) and Hair et al. (2019). HTMT is defined as the mean value of the item correlations across constructs

relative to the geometric mean of the average correlations for items measuring the same construct. In other words, it tests if purported different constructs, for example Psychological Safety, Leadership Behavior, and Turnover Intention, are actually measuring different underlying concepts or whether they are statistically overlapping to the point of redundancy.

HTMT values for all pairs of latent constructs in this model-Leadership Behavior and Psychological Safety; Turnover Intention and Psychological Safety; Turnover Intention and Leadership Behavior-were below a very conservative threshold of .85, recommended as the upper bound for conceptually related behavioral constructs (Henseler et al., 2015; Franke & Sarstedt, 2019). None even remotely approached the stricter .85 cutoff and were well below a more relaxed .90 upper bound sometimes applied in organizational research to indicate sufficient discriminant validity between latent variables that are supposed to be somewhat related.

This means that (i) Psychological Safety is statistically distinguishable from Leadership Behavior, (ii) both variables are also not reducible to Turnover Intention, and (iii) employees' reported sense of safety, their perception of leadership conduct, and intention to quit appear as three theoretically and empirically separate latent variables within the model. Discriminant validity needs to be established at this stage so that meaningful structural paths can later be interpreted between distinct constructs. As per the HTMT criteria satisfied by our data.

**Table No 4: Decision about Hypotheses**

| Hypothesis | Path                                                  | Beta ( $\beta$ ) | t-Value | p-Value | Decision |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---------|---------|----------|
| H1         | Psychological Safety $\rightarrow$ Turnover Intention | -0.215           | 3.41    | 0.000   | Accepted |
| H2         | Leadership Behavior $\rightarrow$ Turnover Intention  | -0.228           | 3.52    | 0.001   | Accepted |

**Table No 5: Value of R<sup>2</sup>**

| Dependent Variable | R <sup>2</sup> Value | Interpretation                                      |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Turnover Intention | 0.42                 | Moderate explanatory power (42% variance explained) |

## 4.2 Structural Analysis

The structural model was assessed in order to test the hypothesized relationship between the two independent variables of Psychological Safety and Leadership Behavior with the dependent variable Turnover Intention. The path coefficient of Psychological Safety to Turnover Intention was negative and significant ( $\beta = -0.215$ ,  $t = 3.41$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This further tells that perceived psychological safety relates to lower turnover intention; hence, a person having freedom from any fear while speaking up is less likely to think about leaving an organization. It supports the argument on psychologically safe work climates as a protective resource that reduces employees' cognitive withdrawal and desire to exit.

The path from Leadership Behavior to Turnover Intention was also negative and statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.228$ ,  $t = 3.52$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Supportive, fair, and constructive leadership behavior reduces employees' intention to quit. The magnitude of the path coefficient places

leadership behavior on par with psychological safety in shaping turnover intention, slightly stronger in this sample. Both hypotheses H2 and H8 were accepted, meaning empirical evidence for both relational and climate-related factors — not only financial or structural factors — directly playing a role in whether employees think about resigning. This is consistent with standard PLS-SEM practice, where path coefficients are considered meaningful when their *p*-values are below 0.05 and *t*-values above 1.96 (Hair et al., 2019).

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) for Turnover Intention showed a value of 0.42. Thus, Psychological Safety and Leadership Behavior account for 42% in explaining the variance of employees' turnover intention. An  $R^2$  value is interpreted as being weak at around 0.25, moderate at approximately 0.50, and substantial at about 0.75 with respect to the context of research and complexity of the model which could be provided by Chin (1998) and Hair et al., (2019) among others using academic references therefore this paper's  $R^2 = 0.42$  can be considered as having moderate explanatory power nearly half ( $<1/2$ ) that high one psychosocial factor whether they feel safe within their working environment or how they perceive leadership conduct. This highlights that turnover intention in the Pakistani organizational context is not random — it is meaningfully shaped by climate and leadership quality — and it confirms that these two predictors are both managerially relevant and strategically actionable.

## 5. Discussion & Conclusion

The first hypothesis tested was the relationship between psychological safety and intention to leave. The results indicate a negative and significant link between psychological safety and employees' intention to quit. When employees feel free to express concerns, admit mistakes, and ask for help or support without fear of punishment or humiliation, they are less likely to contemplate leaving the organization. This finding supports Edmondson's (1999) original proposition that open communication flourishes in organizations with high levels of psychological safety and, consequently, minimal defensive withdrawal behavior. Pakistani evidence also shows a similar trend: Iqbal et al. (2022) found that emotional exhaustion and stress among employees in IT firms in Pakistan are perceived to be lower when the workplace is safe, hence low pull factors toward quitting. In organizations with hierarchical structures and where cultural norms discourage dissent, such as private organizations in Pakistan, psychological safety plays a role analogous to formal protection mechanisms, which employees typically lack. An employee perceives organizational listening as less risky than penalizing; staying is construed as less personally risky; serious intentions to leave are discouraged. The study confirms that psychological safety is viewed not only as an engagement resource but also a retention mechanism in the post-pandemic Pakistani labor market (Arain & Hameed, 2023), where voluntary exits are increasingly motivated by dignity and well-being rather than salary alone.

The second hypothesis assumed the effect of leadership behavior on turnover intention. The results specify that leadership behavior is also negatively and significantly related to turnover intention, meaning that constructive, fair, and respectful leadership lowers the likelihood that employees plan to resign. In the Pakistani context, where organizational cultures are high on

power distance and leaders are viewed as authoritative decision-makers, leadership is interpreted not only as a source of direction but as a source of moral climate and justice. Discussion from sectoral evidence in Pakistani industries suggests that employees are more willing to remain when they trust leadership to act with fairness and respect, when supervisors are seen to protect employee interests rather than exploit them. In several knowledge-intensive sectors such as pharmaceuticals and private education, leaders' trust and perceived fairness were repeatedly identified by employees as central to their decision to continue rather than to search for external alternatives. Even in such an environment, this implies that workers are willing to leave if leadership is perceived as abusive, dismissive, or politically unsafe, and when integrity, recognition, and dignity signals from the top then attached to the organization, and withdrawals get suppressed. In short, effective leadership in Pakistan not only drives performance but also actively prevents resignation.

### 5.1 Practical Implications

The finding goes a long way to proving what Pakistani firms need to do. Psychological safety significantly reduces turnover intention; therefore, retention is no longer about salaries and job titles - it is about whether employees feel safe, respected, and heard. Firms should treat psychological safety as a core element of their HR and retention strategy, which practically means creating formal non-punitive channels for employee voice (confidential escalation mechanisms; structured feedback sessions; skip-level meetings) plus explicit training for managers on how to respond with problem-solving rather than blame when employees raise issues, any kind of issue. Careers do not get damaged by raising workload pressure or unfair treatment, or procedural gaps, then most likely, so many people will never even think about leaving. In Pakistan's high power-distance culture, silence is usually self-protection; so if the company actively signals "you will not be punished for telling the truth," it is directly intervening at the stage where turnover intention begins forming. Making psychological safety measurable — for example, through regular climate surveys, reporting rates, and follow-up actions — turns it from an abstract "soft culture" idea into a retention KPI. In other words, retention should be monitored not only through resignation rates, but through how safe people feel while they are still inside the organization.

The negative, significant relationship between leadership behavior and turnover intention shows that people in Pakistan often leave bosses, not companies. This makes leadership quality an operational risk factor, not merely a style preference. Organizations must therefore stop treating "toxic but high-performing" managers as acceptable trade-offs. Instead, leadership behavior — fairness, respect, willingness to support, and basic professional dignity — should be embedded in performance evaluation, promotion criteria, and bonus structures. Leaders who humiliate staff, ignore concerns, take credit, threaten insecurity, or use authority to control through fear are directly increasing the organization's intention-to-quit rate. On the other hand, supervisors who defend their teams, recognize effort, clarify expectations, and act with consistency reduce resignation pressure even when external market conditions are unstable.

Practically, this implies three immediate steps: (i) mandatory leadership development focused on relational competence, not just technical delivery; (ii) upward feedback on managers, so employees can safely rate their direct supervisors; and (iii) consequences for leadership behaviors that increase attrition risk. In a context like Pakistan, where leaders symbolically represent the organization, respectful leadership is not “nice to have,” it is the frontline retention mechanism.

Both results together send one clear message: retention in Pakistan is now psychosocial. HR policies must therefore move beyond transactional fixes (incremental pay adjustments, ad hoc counteroffers when someone resigns) and toward building environments where employees feel protected and led with dignity. First, HR should institutionalize psychological safety as a policy by explicitly stating zero tolerance for retaliation against voice, and by documenting how complaints are handled. Second, the organization should classify “people risk” at the leadership level: departments or units with low psychological safety and weak leadership behavior should be treated as high-turnover-risk zones and intervened on before resignations accelerate. Third, boards and executive teams should understand that these are not only HR issues — they are continuity issues. Losing mid- to high-skill employees erodes institutional memory and slows execution. Retention, therefore, becomes a governance concern. These twin levers provide organizations in Pakistan and peer economies a direct, evidence-based path to reducing turnover intention without relying solely on financial incentives, which are costly, short-term, and often unsustainable. Creating an environment of psychological safety, accompanied by leading with the new behaviors, goes a long way in reducing intentions of leaving among employees.

## 5.2 Theory Contributions Section

This study makes a theoretical contribution in two significant ways: (a) it extends the general propositions of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) to a Pakistani context by showing that two specific job resources—psychological safety and leadership behavior significantly and negatively predict turnover intention. The JD-R model argues that job resources help employees cope with strain, protect well-being, and reduce withdrawal outcomes. Intention to quit is reduced by psychological safety and leadership behavior, both expressed empirically in this study, hence supporting the notion proposed by such buffers as retention buffer functioning in workplaces of high pressure and high power distance. Even where job demands are intense, uncertain, or politically threatening, employees form lesser resignation intentions when they perceive (i) that it is safe to speak up without punishment (Edmondson, 1999) and (ii) that leaders act with fairness, protection, and respect (Yukl, 2013).

It also proposes a more relevant construct of JD-R for collectivist, hierarchical labor markets like Pakistan’s. Most of the JD-R literature has been developed in Western contexts with already existing flatter hierarchies and formal voice mechanisms. In such settings, “psychological safety” is assumed rather than explicitly constructed as a scarce resource, which, in fact it is within workplaces in countries like Pakistan. Leadership here cannot simply be

conceived as an operational function but also—and perhaps even more so—as a social-psychological shield that either makes staying feel safe or makes leaving feel necessary. By empirically connecting these two forms of human resource directly (rather than through intermediate outcomes such as only engagement) to turnover intention, this research reframes voluntary quit behavior as employee resource protection action, thus making turnover intention per se a non-economic behavior, however, contextually sensitive psychosocial response to perceived threat. In theory, this widens JD-R from “resources improve motivation” to “resources also prevent exit.” It emphasizes that leadership behavior and psychological safety should be treated as core retention resources within the JD-R framework in emerging economies.

### 5.3 Limitations of the Study

As in any empirical research, certain limitations have to be recognized in this study. First, the study is cross-sectional: all data were collected at a single point in time; hence, the design only permits the identification of statistical associations between psychological safety, leadership behavior, and turnover intention. Causality cannot be determined. For instance, it cannot be determined that low psychological safety leads to higher turnover intention. Both variables can only be found to move together significantly and in a theoretically meaningful way. A longitudinal design with the same employees observed over several time periods would enable future researchers to observe how changes in leadership behavior or changes in felt psychological safety translate into the development (or reduction) of turnover intention over time.

Second, sampling was restricted to only a few sectors (for example, pharmaceuticals, IT, and education/high-skill services) because visible retention pressure and relatively high voluntary exit rates by employees are being experienced in these sectors. Therefore, findings may not be fully generalizable to other domains such as heavy manufacturing, banking, logistics, retail, public sector administration, or agriculture, where employment contracts and power structures with very different exit options prevail. Particularly noteworthy is that low mobility or highly unionized environments shape the turnover intention compared with competitive urban professional labor markets. Future research should apply the present model across a broader industry set, inclusive of blue-collar and public sector work, to test for the same psychosocial predictors.

Third, since the data are based on self-reported questionnaires, reporting bias and common method bias cannot be ruled out. In a high power-distance country like Pakistan, where expressing dissatisfaction with leadership is considered risky or inappropriate, respondents may underreport their negative perceptions of supervisors or soften their stated intention to quit to appear loyal or to avoid perceived consequences. Thus, the actual strength of dissatisfaction with leadership behavior and the true level of turnover intention might be even higher than what has been captured in this survey. Although anonymity was ensured to minimize this effect, social desirability bias can still be completely ruled out.

In the interest of clarity, the structural model was also kept intentionally minimalist. The two independent variables (psychological safety and leadership behavior) and one dependent variable (turnover intention) were examined with no mediators or moderators introduced. This makes it easy to interpret and apply practically, but it is theoretically limiting. It does not test if perceived organizational justice, job satisfaction, burnout, or affective commitment to the organization help in explaining the translation of psychological safety and leadership behavior into turnover intention, nor boundary conditions such as gender, tenure, or contract security that may strengthen or weaken these relationships. Future work should incorporate such mediating and moderating mechanisms to build a more layered explanatory model of why employees in Pakistan decide to consider quitting..

### 5.4 Future Directions

Future research should adopt a longitudinal design that tracks the development of psychological safety, leadership behavior, and eventually turnover intention in time. Therefore, this cross-sectional snapshot does not fully explain whether employees with low psychological safety start planning their exits or if already intended-to-quit employees begin perceiving their leaders more negatively. Only changes in one and the same employee over time can provide information about whether workplace climate–leadership practice intensity or de-tensification influences the intention (after a policy change, new leader, restructuring, macro events like inflation/hiring freeze). This would allow for stronger causal interpretation concerning two psychosocial resources’ actual staying/leaving decision formation.

Future research should expand its sampling frame to include rural, blue-collar, and informal settings outside the urban, professional, white-collar core. The present model should be applied in government departments and organizations, public sector enterprises, factories, warehouse and transport workers, hospital ancillary staff, banking field staff, and even semi-formal or informal labor environments, as well as rural settings. Pakistan’s workforce is not homogeneous: power distance, fear of job loss, bargaining power & exit alternatives differ sharply between, say, an IT analyst in Karachi vs a shift supervisor in a textile unit in Faisalabad. To claim broader relevance, we need to know whether psychological safety & leadership behavior still predict turnover intention in lower wage & more vulnerable segments of the labor market-especially where quitting a job carries higher personal as well as financial risk. Including blue-collar & informal workers is essential to avoid building theory only on privileged labor segments.

A third direction is to introduce mediators and moderators into the model. This study kept the structure intentionally simple — psychological safety and leadership behavior as predictors, turnover intention as the outcome — but future work should explain how and for whom these effects occur. Potential mediators such as perceived organizational justice, job satisfaction, burnout, emotional exhaustion, or affective commitment could clarify the mechanism through which unsafe climates and poor leadership translate into the motivation to resign. Likewise, potential moderators such as gender, tenure, contract security (permanent vs. contractual),

managerial level, or organization type (local vs. multinational) could test whether some groups are more sensitive to leadership treatment than others. For example, it is plausible that early-career employees may form turnover intention faster in response to disrespectful leadership than late-career employees who feel economically locked in.

Last but not least, comparative work at the South Asian level would feed theoretical depth into an understanding of turnover intention. Pakistan is a high power-distance country with economic volatility and often an insecure employment climate; therefore, testing the same model of psychological safety and leadership behavior predicting turnover intention in neighboring contexts, such as India, Bangladesh, or Sri Lanka, may display how cultural norms, labor protections, and economic alternatives condition the decision to quit. Cross-cultural testing will help answer whether, in these environments, it is primarily a psychological safety issue (leaving because “I do not feel safe here”), a leadership morality issue (leaving because “my boss treats me unfairly”), or an economic mobility issue (leaving because “I have better external options”). This allows the model to move from being context-specific toward becoming part of a broader regional theory of voluntary turnover in developing economies.

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