

AUTHOR ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT (AAM)

Article title:

Do people leave managers or organisations? An Integrative review of employee turnover through the lenses of LMX and JD-R

Journal:

International Journal of Organizational Analysis (Emerald Publishing)

Manuscript ID:

IJOA-09-2025-6007.R2

DOI:

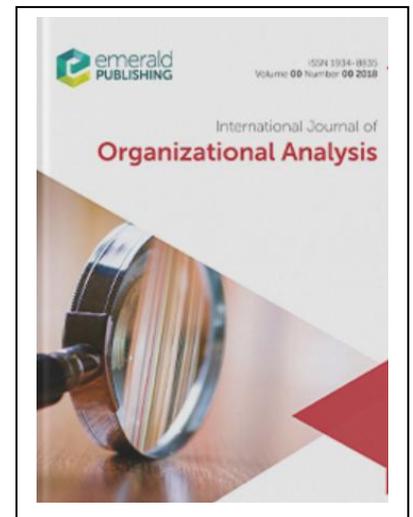
10.1108/IJOA-09-2025-6007

Authors:

1. Yusoff, Asrif
2. Johari Jiken, Jafni

Date accepted for publication:

20-Feb-2026



Manuscript version:

Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) – accepted for publication following peer review. This is not the final published version (Version of Record).

Status statement:

This is the Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) of an article accepted for publication in the International Journal of Organizational Analysis, published by Emerald Publishing. The final Version of Record will be available via Emerald Insight.

Self-archiving / repository note:

The full text of this AAM should be made publicly available in an institutional repository only after the final Version of Record has been published on Emerald Insight (www.emerald.com/insight).

Deposit licence:

This AAM is deposited under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial International Licence 4.0 (CC BY-NC 4.0). Any reuse is permitted in accordance with the terms of this licence. For commercial reuse, permission should be sought from Emerald Publishing.

Do people leave managers or organisations? An Integrative review of employee turnover through the lenses of LMX and JD-R

Abstract

Purpose: This integrative review examines the validity of the suggestion that, “people leave managers, not organisations”. This is done through the synthesis of existing evidence on employee turnover through the lenses of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. The study aims to understand how leadership influences turnover and how it compares with organisational factors.

Design/methodology/approach: An integrative review of 39 peer-reviewed studies from 2014 – 2025 was conducted focusing on organisational settings that linked leadership or managerial behaviour and organisational factors to turnover intentions and decisions.

Findings: From the analysis conducted, leadership affects turnover primarily by increasing or eroding resources, and shaping demands. Transformational, servant, and ethical leadership behaviours are consistently associated with lower turnover intentions while toxic, abusive, and transactional patterns relate to higher attrition. The literature also indicates that organisational factors (e.g., compensation, growth, workload, scheduling) remain significant predictors of employee turnover. The review refines the suggestion that “people leave managers” by indicating that more specifically, people leave when demands chronically exceed resources. In this regard, both leadership behaviour and organisational design jointly determine that balance.

Originality: The review integrates LMX within the JD-R architecture and specifies mechanisms (i.e., resource and demand pathways) and boundary conditions (i.e., demand-resource balance relative to leadership effects). This approach moves beyond either-or accounts of the binary “manager vs. organisation” claim on turnover decision. It also offers a sequenced and actionable agenda for implementation across HR practice.

Keywords: employee turnover; retention; leader-member exchange (LMX); job demands-resources (JD-R); work design; organisational factors; boundary conditions

Do people leave managers or organisations? An Integrative review of employee turnover through the lenses of LMX and JD-R

Introduction

People leave their jobs for many reasons. In a 2023 survey of 2,000 full-time employees in the United Kingdom, the top three reasons leading people to quit their jobs are insufficient pay, burnout due to workload, and poor relationships with line managers (Mercer, 2023). Based on their research of job switchers across industries over the course of 15 years, Bernstein et al. (2024) asserted that while compensation, career growth, and work-life balance contribute to organisational turnover, employees often leave due to feeling undervalued or disrespected by their managers. Similarly, Kang et al. (2022) found that individuals are more likely to quit when they experience consecutive difficult tasks, suggesting that the way managers distribute tasks can influence organisational turnover.

These findings suggest the significance of the role that managers play and their relationships with direct reports in affecting staff retention and workforce attrition. The patterns point to both relationship dynamics with line managers and structural features of organisational work design as plausible drivers of employee departures. To make sense of this indication, this study builds on two complementary lenses, Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. The intent is to specify boundary conditions between leadership and structure. The central claim advanced by this study is that leadership is influential, but not dominant, when job demands exceed the resource capacity of employees.

From an academic perspective, the widespread usage of the saying “people leave managers, not organisations” raises an interest to assess and validate how true the statement actually is. Existing research does acknowledge the role of leadership in employee retention (AbdELhay *et al.*, 2025; Goens and Giannotti, 2024; Tyagi, 2021). But there remains a need for a structured analysis to determine the extent of how leadership compares to organisational influences (Kanchana and Jayathilaka, 2023; Puhakka *et al.*, 2021). This is particularly relevant

in leadership research, where effective management practices are frequently linked to employee engagement and job satisfaction (Ozturk *et al.*, 2021; Prentice, 2022; Van Tuin *et al.*, 2021).

Similarly, in human resource (HR) strategy, understanding the factors that drive turnover is crucial for designing retention policies, training programmes, and well-being initiatives (Dupe *et al.*, 2022; Islam and Amin, 2022). Given the evolving nature of modern-day work, including inter-generational workforce and flexible working, the role of leadership in shaping employee experience and talent retention has become increasingly complex. However, the literature remains less clear on the boundary conditions between leadership effects and structural demands in influencing turnover decisions. Positioning LMX within JD-R provides a feasible way to examine these mechanisms.

Foundational turnover models view leaving as a withdrawal decision shaped by the desirability of leaving and the ease of movement (March *et al.*, 1958; Price, 1977). Building on this, an LMX and JD-R framing specifies how manager-employee exchange quality and work allocation shape withdrawal processes and turnover decisions (Hom *et al.*, 2017). Existing turnover syntheses often sit in parallel streams. Broad reviews summarise multiple predictors, but there remains scope to integrate leadership and structural conditions in a single model (Griffeth *et al.*, 2000; Hom *et al.*, 2017).

Some relationship-focused work links exchange quality to turnover intentions but treats organisational context as secondary (Dulebohn *et al.*, 2012), and leadership meta-analyses estimate overall associations with room to clarify when structural demands constrain leadership (Mackey *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, existing JD-R reviews explain turnover through a demands-resources process in which leadership is just one resource among many (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). This review therefore integrates LMX as the proximal relational mechanism within a JD-R architecture to explain how leadership and structure jointly shape turnover decisions.

To examine this phenomenon, this study explores the following two questions: (1) How does leadership behaviour influence employee turnover? and (2) How does it compare to organisational factors? An integrative

review of 39 papers from the leadership and HR management literature was conducted to analyse existing research from 2014 – 2025, using transparent search and selection procedures and a theoretical synthesis building upon LMX and JD-R. This approach allowed a comparison of leadership and organisational factors in a single framework, which enables a clearer understanding of whether leadership is a dominant driver of employee turnover, or if broader organisational aspects play an equally significant role. The boundary conditions outlined in this study specify how and when leadership is insufficient to offset structural demands, and integrates LMX with JD-R to contrast leadership with structural drivers. It also proposes a research agenda and actionable implications for HR practice.

Theoretical Framework

LMX and JD-R were chosen for this study because they link leadership processes to turnover through relational and demand-resource mechanisms.

The LMX theory (Dansereau *et al.*, 1975) focuses on the dyadic or two-way relationships between leaders and employees, emphasising how high-quality or low-quality exchanges can impact job satisfaction and morale and leads to turnovers. In this regard, leaders develop unique relationships with each subordinate namely high-quality LMX relationships (i.e., trust, respect, support), and low-quality LMX relationships (i.e., limited interaction, lack of trust, minimal support). In the context of this study, LMX helps to analyse whether leadership quality is a dominant predictor of voluntary turnover (Harris *et al.*, 2005). This can either come in the forms of resource-related provisions (e.g., role clarity, access to information, autonomy) and factors related to work demands (e.g., uneven workload, role conflict, emotional labour).

LMX differentiation between leader and team members may also lead to comparisons between employees which can amplify these effects. In this regard, for substantial evidence linking poor leadership to turnover decisions, LMX theory can be a foundational explanation as low-quality exchanges may limit resource provisions and increase demand factors. Conversely, when organisational factors emerge as stronger predictors, this may suggest that LMX quality alone is insufficient to explain turnover as a whole.

The JD-R model (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001) offers a broader organisational perspective by identifying two key factors that shape employee well-being and retention namely job demands (i.e., work-related stressors), and job resources (i.e., managerial support that helps employees stay engaged). The model has parallels to LMX and posits that when job demands exceed available resources, employees experience burnout, reduced engagement, and increased turnover intentions (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). In the context of this study, leadership mitigates these effects by providing support on career development and workload management (Schaufeli, 2017).

Leaders both add resources (e.g., clarity, support) and shape demands (e.g., task assignment, time allocation) which would also place LMX within the JD-R construct. The assertion that employees are more likely to quit after experiencing consecutive difficult tasks, for example, aligns with the JD-R model (Kang *et al.*, 2022). When burnout and excessive workload act as primary drivers of turnover, instead of poor leadership, it suggests that organisational factors play a stronger role than leadership behaviours in turnover decisions.

In this study, LMX and JD-R are integrated to explain turnover as a demand-resource process in which leadership operates through a proximal relational mechanism. LMX clarifies how leader-member relationship quality shapes key job resources that strengthen commitment, while the JD-R captures how job demands can drive exhaustion and withdrawal even when relationships are positive. Leadership enters the JD-R system through LMX by influencing the supply of resources and, at times, by intensifying demands through managerial behaviours. LMX shapes how demands are experienced, buffering strain when support is consistent, or compounding strain when exchanges are low quality or uneven across team members. However, leadership is not unconstrained. Organisational structures set baseline demands and resources, which limits how much leadership can influence or shift the overall balance. Leadership can support retention when resource gains offset demands, but its effect weakens when structural hindrances remain persistently high.

Based on this theoretical framework, the guiding proposition for this study is outlined across three segments. First, the resource pathway whereby higher quality LMX reduces turnover intentions by increasing key resources. Second, the demand pathway whereby leadership behaviours that concentrate hindrances increase

turnover intentions independent of the baseline LMX. Third, the boundary condition whereby the retention effect of LMX weakens as demands rise or structural resources fall.

Methodology

In conducting the integrative literature review, three key databases were referred to namely Scopus, Web of Science, and Directory of Open Access Journals. Searches combined turnover terms (e.g., turnover, quit, resign, attrition, retention) with leadership terms (e.g., leader, supervisor, manager, leader-member exchange, leadership) and organisational terms (e.g., salary, compensation, work design, workload, job demands-resources, career progression). As the search was conducted iteratively, the exact database specific search strings were not archived. Appendix A reports the keyword blocks used and the screening logic applied.

The review timeline for this study was on papers published between 2014 – 2025 to identify developments prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and over the past five years since it has changed the workplace environment. The findings were also compared descriptively across two periods i.e., 2014 – 2019 and 2020 – 2025, noting shifts in constructs and mechanisms rather than effect sizes, given the diversity of designs and measures across studies. Inclusion criteria include peer-reviewed journal articles in English conducted in organisational employment settings that examined leadership or manager behaviours in relation to turnover. Exclusion criteria include non-organisational settings and non-peer-reviewed sources.

Based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, records were screened in two stages beginning with title and abstract screening to remove irrelevant items. This was followed by full-text assessment for fit with the research questions. Where available, record counts from database exports and filtrations are summarised in Appendix A. The final set comprised 39 studies. A formal quality scoring tool was not applied due to diversity of research designs adopted across the literature selected. Instead, methodological credibility was considered during extraction by noting clarity of design, transparency of measures and analysis, and whether conclusions were supported by reported findings, as outlined in Appendix B. The PRISMA diagram for this study is presented in Appendix C.

From each study, the parameters recorded included author, publication year, sampling, design, construct, and key findings, and limitations. For synthesis, a deductive and inductive approach was applied. Findings were organised into two areas, resources and demands, that are linked to LMX and JD-R mechanisms. The synthesis involved an initial deductive process using JD-R and LMX as organising constructs. This involves categorising extracted findings as demand-related or resource-related and noting whether leadership operated through LMX quality, support, or demand increase. Inductive themes were then identified through manual coding of the extracted findings. This involved clustering recurring patterns of predictors and mechanisms that appeared across multiple studies. Labels such as “managerial behaviours” emerged when multiple studies described specific supervisor actions (e.g., micromanagement, abuse of power, lack of support) as factors of turnover intentions. Similarly, “organisational constraints” emerged when studies repeatedly pointed to structural conditions (e.g., compensation, workload, organisational change) as dominant drivers that constrained leadership effects. Emergent themes are discussed in the next section.

Findings

From the integrative review of 39 peer-reviewed papers conducted, the extent to which leadership or managerial behaviours influence employee turnover was analysed in comparison to organisational factors. Several themes were identified in the effort to understand the link between leadership and turnover. In this section, three key themes are discussed namely the role of leadership in employee turnover, managerial behaviours influencing turnover intentions, and the relative impact of organisational and leadership factors. The discussions were interpreted through the lenses of LMX and JD-R.

A minor descriptive split was noted across the reviewed papers from 2014 – 2019 and 2020 – 2025. This indicates a marginal shift in emphasis within the literature. Studies in the 2014 – 2019 subset primarily model leadership as a predictor of turnover intentions via relationship quality and attitudinal mechanisms (e.g., commitment, job satisfaction). These findings treat organisational context as background condition rather than central explanatory factor (Lim *et al.*, 2017; Waldman *et al.*, 2015). Studies from 2020 – 2025 foreground how leadership effects operate through (or constrained by) demand and strain conditions. These include

workload pressures, burnout, emotional labour, uncertainty, and work design (Buss and Kearney, 2024; Oh and Chhinzer, 2021; Puhakka *et al.*, 2021). This pattern aligns with the overarching JD-R framing of this study where leadership contributes to resource and demand balance.

The role of leadership in employee turnover

Across the reviewed studies, leadership constructs are linked to turnover primarily in two ways: increasing or eroding job resources and shaping job demands. Among the variety of leadership approaches, transformational leadership is often linked to reduced turnover intentions, while toxic or abusive leadership is associated with higher attrition.

Transformational leadership is an approach whereby the manager seeks to inspire and mentor team members in enhancing autonomy and competence which can raise job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Cao *et al.*, 2025; Yusoff, 2025). These traits can reduce turnover intentions as employees who experience this approach exhibit strong loyalty resulting from increased trust, improved capability, and better perceived work-life balance (AbdELhay *et al.*, 2025; Goens and Giannotti, 2024). The literature points to transformational leadership as a moderator to turnover intentions given the positive impact that it generates in the leader-follower relationship at work (Chandra *et al.*, 2023; Kaymakçı *et al.*, 2022; Oh and Chhinzer, 2021; Waldman *et al.*, 2015). In contrast, transactional leadership which keeps the leader-follower engagement only at the surface level is associated with higher turnover rates especially when hindrances such as corporate bureaucracy or lengthy processes are high (Lim *et al.*, 2017; Prentice, 2022; Waldman *et al.*, 2015). This approach is commonly demonstrated by managers who focus solely on task execution with minimal effort to foster constructive relationships with employees.

Another leadership style linked to positive work environments is servant leadership where leaders prioritise the development of staff which may contribute to stronger work engagement and job satisfaction (Ozturk *et al.*, 2021). The literature indicates that servant leadership is imperative to influencing positive outcomes at the workplace both in terms of operational productivity and staff well-being (De Clerck *et al.*, 2024; Khanam and

Tarab, 2024; Wibowo and Paramita, 2022). A similar approach is ethical leadership whereby fairness and integrity are strongly fostered, consequently lowering both turnover intention and actual turnover decisions (Choi, 2025; Ustun *et al.*, 2024). Several findings from the literature highlight how ethical leadership reduces turnover intention while moderating the effects of resignation among employees (Choi, 2025; Ustun *et al.*, 2024). It fosters an ethical climate that strengthens staff retention, although its impact depends on follower moral identity and is strengthened by the behaviours of leaders (Marquardt *et al.*, 2022; Yasin *et al.*, 2021). A summary of the leadership styles discussed in this section is outlined in Table 1.

Leadership style	Influence on turnover	Supporting studies
Transformational leadership	Reduce turnover, foster commitment	(AbdELhay <i>et al.</i> , 2025; Cao <i>et al.</i> , 2025; Chandra <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Goens and Giannotti, 2024; Kaymakcı <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Oh and Chhinzer, 2021; Waldman <i>et al.</i> , 2015)
Servant leadership	Enhance retention, prioritises employee wellbeing	(De Clerck <i>et al.</i> , 2024; Khanam and Tarab, 2024; Ozturk <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Wibowo and Paramita, 2022)
Ethical leadership	Reduce turnover, foster fairness	(Choi, 2025; Marquardt <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Ustun <i>et al.</i> , 2024; Yasin <i>et al.</i> , 2021)
Transactional leadership	Higher turnover	(Lim <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Prentice, 2022; Waldman <i>et al.</i> , 2015)

Table 1: Leadership style influence on employee turnover (Source: Author)

It needs to be highlighted, however, that the literature indicates how the moderating impact of leadership on turnover decision can be industry specific. Healthcare and education are two industries that stand out in terms of correlation between leadership style and turnover in view of the job demand (Schildhouse and Kim, 2022; Zhang and Zhang, 2024). In these roles, the baseline demands on workload and emotional labour can be high. Similarly, cultural expectations can also diversify the way leadership affects turnovers. In collectivist cultures, the tolerance of poor leadership may be stronger as compared to individualistic cultures where career growth is prioritised more significantly (Waldman *et al.*, 2015; Wibowo and Paramita, 2022). These are the

specificities that can inform future research in contextualising any empirical study to industrial or cultural aspects.

Managerial behaviours influencing turnover intentions

While leadership styles can shape the overall culture of a team, direct managerial behaviours are often cited as a leading cause of voluntary resignations. Poor managerial conduct ranging from micromanagement to abusive supervision can significantly influence employee turnover (Griep *et al.*, 2025). Several studies highlight the detrimental effects of toxic leadership including authoritarianism, lack of empathy, and favouritism. These experiences get exacerbated when uncertainties come into the picture (Buss and Kearney, 2024; Lopes *et al.*, 2025; Potipiroon and Chumphong, 2024). As a result, employees who experience such leadership often report increased burnout, emotional labour, and intentions to leave (Nunes and Palma-Moreira, 2024; Zhang and Zhang, 2024). Furthermore, as employees expect mentorship from managers as part of their role, the absence of guidance and career development support would lead to disengagement and higher turnover intentions (Kanchana and Jayathilaka, 2023; Prentice, 2022).

Studies within the literature also suggest that when employees feel ignored or unappreciated by their direct supervisors, which can impact their overall sense of belonging and well-being, they are more likely to seek employment elsewhere (Islam and Amin, 2022). A summary of the managerial behaviours discussed in this section is outlined in Table 2. These indications of how unfavourable managerial behaviours impact staff morale might sound elementary. Nevertheless, the evidence from the literature signal how an understanding of why these long-standing issues continues to occur is needed, especially as the workplace becomes more diverse and dynamic.

Managerial behaviour	Influence on turnover	Supporting studies
Toxic leadership	Increase turnover due to job stress and disengagement	(Buss and Kearney, 2024; Griep <i>et al.</i> , 2025; Lopes <i>et al.</i> , 2025; Nunes and Palma-Moreira, 2024; Potipiroon and Chumphong, 2024; Zhang and Zhang, 2024)
Lack of support	Lead to disengagement and job search	(Islam and Amin, 2022; Kanchana and Jayathilaka, 2023; Prentice, 2022)

Table 2: Managerial behaviours influencing turnover (Source: Author)

While much of the reviewed literature models turnover as individual decision, several studies indicate turnover to be socially embedded within teams. In particular, turnover can become contagious, where resignations by colleagues increase the perceived feasibility or desirability of leaving. This can amplify exit decisions beyond individual job attitudes alone (Oh and Chhinzer, 2021). This aligns with the LMX lens as leaders do not develop uniform relationships with all team members. LMX differentiation can trigger social comparisons and perceptions of unfairness, which intensifies withdrawal among those experiencing lower-quality exchanges (Dansereau *et al.*, 1975). This suggests how the “people leave managers” stance operates through dyadic relationship quality and the wider team climate that shape exit norms.

Several mitigating strategies are discussed in the literature in addressing the challenges of adverse leadership styles. Leaders who adopt coaching in their leadership of others can build stronger empathy in understanding their direct reports, consequently leading to strong organisational commitment (Lim *et al.*, 2017; Wesemann, 2024). In JD-R terms, coaching-oriented behaviours described in these studies primarily operate by strengthening job resources which can buffer the strain effects of high workload. Coaching can also reduce perceived demands by enabling earlier clarification of priorities and constraints reduces stress driven by uncertainty.

Furthermore, coaching trains leaders to adopt active listening which is a skill that is not inherent to many but can be acquired with practical applications. Another potential action is the empowerment of employees which

can be done via participative decision-making and inclusive policies which can enhance job satisfaction and retention (Alhajaj and Ahmad, 2024; Ustun *et al.*, 2024). Empowerment, however, requires strong trust levels between leaders and followers. Autonomy granted to employees requires clear and robust guidelines so that governance could be upheld while innovation and process improvement could still be encouraged. Organisational readiness is critical in enabling these intentions.

The relative impact of organisational and leadership factors

While leadership is a critical factor in influencing turnover decisions, both for or against, organisational factors such as compensation, career growth, and work-life balance retain significant roles in inducing employee turnover. Studies indicate that compensation structure remains a primary cause of turnover as financial incentives remain a key driver of employee retention (Croes *et al.*, 2025; Wesemann, 2024). The literature suggests that compensation is a factor that influences a sense of empowerment among employees, which also suggests how both psychological and financial resources play a critical role in mitigating turnover and enhancing retention (Hong *et al.*, 2025; Li *et al.*, 2025). These findings highlight how remuneration strategies are critical in staff retention, especially as the definition of compensation has evolved over the years. Given the priorities of modern-day employees, the mechanisms for rewards in organisations have also changed. An example is the development of compensation to grow from salary remuneration alone, to also now include other aspects of benefits that are more conventional (e.g., medical insurance, leave allowances) and modern (e.g., flexible working provision, sabbatical or career-break programmes).

In terms of professional development, employees are more likely to leave if they perceive limited career growth opportunities. This aspect can be a function of the performance management system in place as well as the sense of competence in the work that they do as employees (Puhakka *et al.*, 2021; Qureshi *et al.*, 2024). At the organisational level, a collaborative performance management framework can also empower staff and foster career growth, while doing the opposite could easily encourage them to look for better stability in other companies (Alhajaj and Ahmad, 2024; Qureshi *et al.*, 2024). These findings suggest that perceived development opportunities shape retention decisions through motivation and job autonomy. This relates to the

purpose and meaning of their respective roles in the organisation. Further, organisational changes either by structure or hierarchy can also cause uncertainties among employees. This may lead to turnover decisions especially when coupled with increasing workload and limited support (Bolt *et al.*, 2025; Van Der Baan *et al.*, 2025). These organisational factors show how structural elements can also influence turnover decisions, even if leadership styles are favourable. A summary of the organisational influences discussed in this section is outlined in Table 3.

Organisational influence	Influence on turnover	Supporting studies
Compensation	Primary factor influencing resignations	(Croes <i>et al.</i> , 2025; Hong <i>et al.</i> , 2025; Li <i>et al.</i> , 2025; Wesemann, 2024)
Career growth	Employees leave when promotion prospects are unclear	(Alhajaj and Ahmad, 2024; Puhakka <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Qureshi <i>et al.</i> , 2024)
Organisational support	Employee retention efforts	(Bolt <i>et al.</i> , 2025; Van Der Baan <i>et al.</i> , 2025)

Table 3: Organisational influences on turnover (Source: Author)

Based on the three themes discussed, leadership is a meaningful influence on turnover, but its relative weight varies and is often constrained by structural features such as workload, compensation, and career systems. In addition to leadership style, managerial behaviours also significantly impact staff retention. These aspects co-exist with prevailing factors that are driven by the organisation such as compensation and career growth. The coexistence of these elements increased the complexity of how the root causes of turnover could be tracked down. The subjectivity of these factors, and the minimal control that management has over the daily impact of these aspects further complicate the ability for organisations to fully grapple with the challenge. In the next section, the findings from the literature are discussed in relation to leadership and HR strategies.

Discussion

In response to the research questions of this study, the findings from this integrative review reveal several insights.

First, transformational and ethical leadership styles are generally associated with lower turnover intentions and, where measured, lower turnover behaviour. This reinforces the notion that leadership quality has a meaningful impact on employees' decisions to resign or remain, as asserted by LMX theory. Second, while poor leadership traits contribute to turnover decisions, they rarely operate in isolation. Organisational factors such as work-life balance, compensation structure, and career growth opportunities also shape employee decisions to stay or leave. When this occurs, leadership effects become weaker or more indirect when these structural conditions were unfavourable (Croes *et al.*, 2025; Hong *et al.*, 2025; Puhakka *et al.*, 2021). A smaller subset of studies also indicates that turnover can be shaped by collective dynamics which reinforces that turnover is not only driven by individual attitudes but can be amplified by positioning taken at team level.

In JD-R terms, leadership primarily works by adding resources and shaping demands, but when organisational factors are significantly high or structural resources are scarce, the effects from leadership weaken. Therefore, leadership behaviours may not always mitigate turnover. Under demanding work situations or toxic organisational cultures, even supportive leadership may fail to prevent employee attrition. Collectively, the evidence challenges the simplified view that “people leave managers, not organisations”. Consequently, the evidence supports a more precise claim whereby people leave when work demands consistently exceed resources. This assertion aligns with the core principle of JD-R, and specifies how LMX quality operates as a mechanism that shapes resources and demands. It also clarifies when leadership effects are likely to weaken. The causes for this situation could vary from leadership style of managers, issues with the existing organisational systems, processes, and structures. From this study, it is indicative that the intention and decision for turnover is an amalgamation of both leadership and organisation factors.

Sector context should also be treated as a boundary condition in interpreting leadership effects on turnover. Across the reviewed literature, leadership operates as a resource mechanism, but its retention value weakens when the demand-resource balance shifts. This is especially salient in higher demand sectors (e.g., healthcare, hospitality, education) where workload intensity and emotional labour can dominate turnover decisions. Cultural context is also a boundary condition. Norms relating to authority and mobility can shape how employees interpret LMX quality. Therefore, the suggested framework is most generalisable at the level where demand-resource imbalance is shaped by LMX, which can vary by sector and culture.

Theoretical and practical implications

The findings contribute to leadership and turnover research by positioning LMX within the JD-R construct rather than treating leadership as a standalone variable. This review advances theory in three ways. First, it positions LMX within the JD-R architecture. Second, it synthesises the reviewed evidence into two explanatory pathways (i.e., building resource, intensifying demand) which organise how leadership relates to turnover intentions or behaviour. Third, it specifies a boundary condition that helps reconcile findings in turnover literature namely how the retention value of leadership weakens when structural demands or resources change.

While LMX theory suggests that high-quality exchanges improve retention, the review indicates that leadership quality alone is necessary but often insufficient. Leadership can moderate and mediate the effects of workplace features. This is done by buffering the impact of workload strain (e.g., better clarity, moral support), or by intensifying demands (e.g., unfair allocation, limiting resources). This finding resurfaces the need to reframe leadership in a contextualised manner in its role of influencing turnover rather than as a universal primary driver.

The findings also align with the broader JD-R model whereby leadership can 'protect' employees against excessive stress thereby reducing turnover intentions. That said, leadership effectiveness is constrained when structural demands remain unaddressed. In such cases, JD-R predicts limited incremental or only marginal

gains from leader behaviour as it gets overpowered by the wider organisational ecosystem. This reinforces the premise that retention strategies must balance leader-focused interventions with structural redesign; two aspects that need to complement each other.

Taking a broader perspective, similar patterns can also be interpreted through Conservation of Resources theory, where turnover risk increases when employees experience resource loss (or gain) in the face of sustained demands (Chen *et al.*, 2024; Kim *et al.*, 2025). Similarly, Job Embeddedness theory further explains why some employees stay despite demands, particularly when links, fit, and perceived sacrifice are high (Hassan *et al.*, 2024; Sender and Eberly, 2025). These lenses are consistent with the LMX and JD-R framing of this study.

In terms of practice, the distinctive value of this review lies in its integrative, sequenced guidance that links HR levers and leader behaviours to the same underlying demand-resource imbalance. Retention efforts should begin by diagnosing and addressing structural demands and resources where feasible (e.g., workload, scheduling, remuneration, growth). Where structural change is slow or constrained, leadership interventions can run in parallel as near-term levers by developing leaders as reliable resource providers. This includes coaching to strengthen support, role clarity, and surface workload constraints. It can also avoid unproductive practices such as arbitrary tasking or last-minute change. Organisations can also monitor and intervene proactively by tracking attrition to detect emerging toxic patterns and pairing these signals with targeted support or corrective action.

These actions should be applied with contextualisation to sectoral needs, particularly in high-demand environments. In these scenarios, workload, staffing, and scheduling pressures can dominate turnover decisions. Furthermore, implementation is often constrained by budgets and longer timelines, creating trade-offs between immediate delivery and redesign. A pragmatic approach is therefore recommended by simultaneously pursuing targeted structural improvements that are within scope, while developing leaders to reduce demand intensification. This avoids the expectation for leaders to compensate for structural problems they cannot control.

Limitations and future research directions

While this review synthesises evidence across multiple industries and settings, sector and culture remain as boundary conditions that shape how strongly leadership effects translate into retention. The findings are best interpreted as mechanisms that show how LMX quality shapes resources and demands. Thus, future research should test these mechanisms across sectors with high demands and across cultural contexts where leadership norms and job mobility expectations differ.

Conclusion

This integrative review challenges the conventional wisdom that “people leave managers, not organisations” by showing that while leadership significantly influences turnover intentions, its effects are conditioned by organisational demands and resources. Leadership quality is important, but it is not a silver bullet as leader effects become less significant when structural demands are high or when structural resources are scarce.

From a theoretical standpoint, the review clarifies when leadership acts as a primary mechanism and when structural conditions dominate. This reframes the leadership factor as a context-sensitive mechanism rather than a standalone cause, especially when viewed from the LMX and JD-R lenses. This contextualised view moves beyond the either-or accounts of turnover decisions and specifies the boundary conditions under which leadership and organisational levers interact.

From a practical standpoint, the findings support retention strategies that address structural constraints, where feasible, alongside developing leaders as reliable resource providers who avoid demand intensifying practices. In this regard, transparent and fair policies set the foundation on which effective leadership can work. Ultimately, organisations should treat leadership and organisational interventions as complementary instead of competing forces, given their counteracting influences. The goal is a well designed system where good leadership thrives within strong organisational practices.

Data availability statement

No new data were generated in this review.

Conflict of interest statement

There is no conflict of interest arising from this study.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or non-profit sectors.

Declaration of generative AI usage

Microsoft Copilot was used in editing this manuscript.

References

- AbdELhay, E.S., Taha, S.M., El-Sayed, M.M., Helaly, S.H. and AbdELhay, I.S. (2025), “Nurses retention: the impact of transformational leadership, career growth, work well-being, and work-life Balance”, *BMC Nursing*, Vol. 24 No. 1, p. 148, doi: 10.1186/s12912-025-02762-1.
- Alhajaj, W.E. and Ahmad, S.Z. (2024), “The effectiveness of human resource management practices, work engagement and self-efficacy in minimizing talent turnover intention”, *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, Vol. 73 No. 8, pp. 2414–2440, doi: 10.1108/IJPPM-02-2023-0090.
- Bakker, A.B. and Demerouti, E. (2007), “The Job Demands-Resources model: state of the art”, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 22 No. 3, pp. 309–328, doi: 10.1108/02683940710733115.
- Bakker, A.B. and Demerouti, E. (2017), “Job demands–resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward.”, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 22 No. 3, pp. 273–285, doi: 10.1037/ocp0000056.
- Bernstein, E., Horn, M. and Moesta, B. (2024), “Why Employees Quit”, *Harvard Business Review*.
- Bolt, E.E.T., Ali, M. and Winterton, J. (2025), “Why nurses quit: Job demands, leadership and voluntary nurse turnover in adult care in the Netherlands”, *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 365, p. 117550, doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2024.117550.
- Buss, M. and Kearney, E. (2024), “Navigating the unknown: Uncertainty moderates the link between visionary leadership, perceived meaningfulness, and turnover intentions”, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 97 No. 3, pp. 776–782, doi: 10.1111/joop.12500.
- Cao, W., Jiang, M., and Dhurakij Pundit University. (2025), “The effect of transformational leadership on teachers turnover intention in private colleges and universities – the mediating role of job satisfaction”, *Perspectives of Science and Education*, Vol. 72 No. 6, pp. 747–761, doi: 10.32744/pse.2024.6.47.
- Chandra, S., Ghosh, P. and Sinha, S. (2023), “Addressing employee turnover in retail through CSR and transformational leadership”, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 51 No. 5, pp. 690–710, doi: 10.1108/IJRDM-07-2022-0237.
- Chen, G., Wang, J., Huang, Q., Sang, L., Yan, J., Chen, R., Cheng, J., *et al.* (2024), “Social support, psychological capital, multidimensional job burnout, and turnover intention of primary medical staff: a path analysis drawing on conservation of resources theory”, *Human Resources for Health*, Vol. 22 No. 1, p. 42, doi: 10.1186/s12960-024-00915-y.

- Choi, I. (2025), "The Influence of Ethical Leadership on Turnover Intention and Actual Turnover in U.S. Federal Agencies", *Public Personnel Management*, p. 00910260251314543, doi: 10.1177/00910260251314543.
- Croes, R., Padrón-Ávila, H., Rivera, M. and Renduchintala, C. (2025), "A triadic model of job retention and turnover dynamics in the hospitality industry", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 37 No. 3, pp. 700–721, doi: 10.1108/IJCHM-02-2024-0298.
- Dansereau, F., Graen, G. and Haga, W.J. (1975), "A vertical dyad linkage approach to leadership within formal organizations", *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 46–78, doi: 10.1016/0030-5073(75)90005-7.
- De Clerck, T., Haerens, L., Devos, G. and Willem, A. (2024), "A self-determination theory perspective on how autonomy-supportive and chaotic leadership relate to volunteers' need-based experiences and turnover intentions: A variable-centered and person-centered approach", *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 777–800, doi: 10.1002/nml.21591.
- Demerouti, E., Bakker, A.B., Nachreiner, F. and Schaufeli, W.B. (2001), "The job demands-resources model of burnout", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 86 No. 3, pp. 499–512.
- Dulebohn, J.H., Bommer, W.H., Liden, R.C., Brouer, R.L. and Ferris, G.R. (2012), "A Meta-Analysis of Antecedents and Consequences of Leader-Member Exchange: Integrating the Past With an Eye Toward the Future", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 38 No. 6, pp. 1715–1759, doi: 10.1177/0149206311415280.
- Dupe, B., Mitton, S., Hughes, L., Gross, E., Wong, C., Martina, K., Townsend, C., *et al.* (2022), "Investing in our human capital: Sharing the experience of implementing a retention strategy at a large academic hospital from a leadership lens", *Journal of Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences*, Vol. 53 No. 4, pp. S100–S106, doi: 10.1016/j.jmir.2022.08.011.
- Goens, B. and Giannotti, N. (2024), "Transformational Leadership and Nursing Retention: An Integrative Review", *Nursing Research and Practice*, Vol. 2024 No. 1, p. 3179141, doi: 10.1155/2024/3179141.
- Griep, Y., Kraak, J.M., Knol, W.M., Dolislager, J. and Beekman, E.M. (2025), "The ripple effect of abusive supervision: A longitudinal examination of psychological contract breach, turnover intentions, and resilience among third parties", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 189, p. 115141, doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115141.
- Griffeth, R.W., Hom, P.W. and Gaertner, S. (2000), "A Meta-Analysis of Antecedents and Correlates of Employee Turnover: Update, Moderator Tests, and Research Implications for the Next Millennium", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 463–488, doi: 10.1177/014920630002600305.

- Harris, K.J., Kacmar, K.M. and Witt, L.A. (2005), "An examination of the curvilinear relationship between leader-member exchange and intent to turnover", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 363–378, doi: 10.1002/job.314.
- Hassan, M.M., Jambulingam, M., Narayan, E.A., Islam, S.N. and Uz Zaman, A. (2024), "Retention Approaches of Millennial at Private Sector: Mediating Role of Job Embeddedness", *Global Business Review*, Vol. 25 No. 4, pp. 861–887, doi: 10.1177/0972150920932288.
- Hom, P.W., Lee, T.W., Shaw, J.D. and Hausknecht, J.P. (2017), "One hundred years of employee turnover theory and research.", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 102 No. 3, pp. 530–545, doi: 10.1037/apl0000103.
- Hong, X., Xue, L., Ma, Y., Fan, H., Chen, Z. and Chen, L. (2025), "Because of Love, I Won't Leave: Harmonious Passion and Turnover Intention Among Primary and Secondary School Teachers", *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 60 No. 1, p. e12911, doi: 10.1111/ejed.12911.
- Islam, M.S. and Amin, M. (2022), "A systematic review of human capital and employee well-being: putting human capital back on the track", *European Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 46 No. 5/6, pp. 504–534, doi: 10.1108/EJTD-12-2020-0177.
- Kanchana, L. and Jayathilaka, R. (2023), "Factors impacting employee turnover intentions among professionals in Sri Lankan startups", *PLOS ONE*, Vol. 18 No. 2, p. e0281729, doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0281729.
- Kang, P., Daniels, D.P. and Schweitzer, M.E. (2022), "The streak-end rule: How past experiences shape decisions about future behaviors in a large-scale natural field experiment with volunteer crisis counselors", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 119 No. 45, p. e2204460119, doi: 10.1073/pnas.2204460119.
- Kaymakçı, R., Görener, A. and Toker, K. (2022), "The perceived overqualification's effect on innovative work behaviour: Do transformational leadership and turnover intention matter?", *Current Research in Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 3, p. 100068, doi: 10.1016/j.crbeha.2022.100068.
- Khanam, Z. and Tarab, S. (2024), "Role of responsible leadership influence to reduce turnover intentions: a double-mediation framework", *Management Research Review*, Vol. 47 No. 9, pp. 1323–1340, doi: 10.1108/MRR-10-2021-0731.
- Kim, J.S., Goh, B.K., Hall, C.M. and Kim, M.J. (2025), "Emotional labor resources and hotel employee well-being: A conservation of resources theory perspective", *Current Issues in Tourism*, pp. 1–10, doi: 10.1080/13683500.2025.2557520.

- Li, Y., Huang, Z., Dineen, B., Wang, M. and Van Jaarsveld, D. (2025), “Voluntary Turnover Rate Fluctuations, Human Resource Practices, and Innovation: A Within-Organization Investigation”, *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 78 No. 1, pp. 103–122, doi: 10.1111/peps.12661.
- Lim, A.J.P., Loo, J.T.K. and Lee, P.H. (2017), “The Impact of Leadership On Turnover Intention: The Mediating Role Of Organizational Commitment And Job Satisfaction”, *Journal of Applied Structural Equation Modeling*, pp. 27–41, doi: 10.47263/JASEM.1(1)04.
- Lopes, T., Soares, A. and Palma-Moreira, A. (2025), “Toxic Leadership and Turnover Intentions: Emotional Intelligence as a Moderator of This Relationship”, *Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 15 No. 1, p. 26, doi: 10.3390/admsci15010026.
- Mackey, J.D., Frieder, R.E., Brees, J.R. and Martinko, M.J. (2017), “Abusive Supervision: A Meta-Analysis and Empirical Review”, *Journal of Management*, Vol. 43 No. 6, pp. 1940–1965, doi: 10.1177/0149206315573997.
- March, J.G., Simon, H.A. and Guetzkow, H.S. (1958), *Organizations*, Wiley [u.a.], New York.
- Marquardt, D.J., Manegold, J. and Brown, L.W. (2022), “Integrating relational systems theory with ethical leadership: how ethical leadership relates to employee turnover intentions”, *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 43 No. 1, pp. 155–179, doi: 10.1108/LODJ-04-2021-0190.
- Mercer. (2023), *Forty Percent of UK Employees Want to Resign despite Financial Concerns*.
- Nunes, A. and Palma-Moreira, A. (2024), “Toxic Leadership and Turnover Intentions: The Role of Burnout Syndrome”, *Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 14 No. 12, p. 340, doi: 10.3390/admsci14120340.
- Oh, J. and Chhinzer, N. (2021), “Is turnover contagious? The impact of transformational leadership and collective turnover on employee turnover decisions”, *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 42 No. 7, pp. 1089–1103, doi: 10.1108/LODJ-12-2020-0548.
- Ozturk, A., Karatepe, O.M. and Okumus, F. (2021), “The effect of servant leadership on hotel employees’ behavioral consequences: Work engagement versus job satisfaction”, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 97, p. 102994, doi: 10.1016/j.ijhm.2021.102994.
- Potipiroon, W. and Chumphong, O. (2024), “Authoritarian leadership and firm-level voluntary turnover among SMEs in Thailand: Does benevolent leadership matter?”, *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, Vol. 19 No. 10, pp. 3182–3201, doi: 10.1108/IJOEM-07-2021-1144.
- Prentice, S.B. (2022), “Job Satisfaction or Employee Engagement: Regardless of Which Comes First, Supportive Leadership Improves Them Both”, *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, Vol. 24 No. 4, pp. 275–285, doi: 10.1177/15234223221112504.

- Price, J.L. (1977), *The Study of Turnover*, Iowa state university, Ames, Iowa.
- Puhakka, I.J.A., Nokelainen, P. and Pylväs, L. (2021), “Learning or Leaving? Individual and Environmental Factors Related to Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intention”, *Vocations and Learning*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 481–510, doi: 10.1007/s12186-021-09275-3.
- Qureshi, T.M., Ghadi, M.Y. and Sindhu, M. (2024), “Examining the influence of continuance performance management on turnover intention: exploring the mediating effects of employee motivation and job autonomy – a practical study in the banking industry in Dubai”, *Industrial and Commercial Training*, Vol. 56 No. 3, pp. 148–165, doi: 10.1108/ICT-09-2023-0066.
- Schaufeli, W.B. (2017), “Applying the Job Demands-Resources model”, *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol. 46 No. 2, pp. 120–132, doi: 10.1016/j.orgdyn.2017.04.008.
- Schildhouse, R.J. and Kim, P.S. (2022), “Leadership & professional development: ‘Acting’ up in the hospital. Leading the way through the Great Resignation”, *Journal of Hospital Medicine*, Vol. 17 No. 8, pp. 639–640, doi: 10.1002/jhm.12900.
- Sender, A. and Eberly, M. (2025), “Navigating the Talent Retention Puzzle: The Role of Workgroup Identification and On-the-Job Embeddedness”, *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 64 No. 3, pp. 811–824, doi: 10.1002/hrm.22279.
- Tyagi, N. (2021), “Aligning organizational culture to enhance managerial effectiveness of academic leaders: an interface for employee engagement and retention”, *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 35 No. 7, pp. 1387–1404, doi: 10.1108/IJEM-10-2020-0447.
- Ustun, F., Koca Balli, A.I. and Balli, E. (2024), “How and why does inner resignation (quiet quitting) impact service innovation behavior? A moderator role of ethical leadership”, *E+M Ekonomie a Management*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 89–105, doi: 10.15240/tul/001/2024-5-018.
- Van Der Baan, N.A., Meinke, G., Virolainen, M.H., Beusaert, S. and Gast, I. (2025), “Retention of newcomers and factors influencing turnover intentions and behaviour: a review of the literature”, *Education + Training*, Vol. 67 No. 1, pp. 107–136, doi: 10.1108/ET-06-2023-0240.
- Van Tuin, L., Schaufeli, W.B. and Van Den Broeck, A. (2021), “Engaging leadership: Enhancing work engagement through intrinsic values and need satisfaction”, *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 483–505, doi: 10.1002/hrdq.21430.
- Waldman, D.A., Carter, M.Z. and Hom, P.W. (2015), “A Multilevel Investigation of Leadership and Turnover Behavior”, *Journal of Management*, Vol. 41 No. 6, pp. 1724–1744, doi: 10.1177/0149206312460679.

- Wesemann, A. (2024), "Turbulence Ahead: Strategic Human Capital Management, Job Satisfaction, and Turnover Intention", *Public Personnel Management*, Vol. 53 No. 1, pp. 148–169, doi: 10.1177/00910260231192482.
- Wibowo, A. and Paramita, W. (2022), "Resilience and Turnover Intention: The Role of Mindful Leadership, Empathetic Leadership, and Self-Regulation", *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 325–341, doi: 10.1177/15480518211068735.
- Yasin, R., Namoco, S.O., Jauhar, J., Abdul Rahim, N.F. and Zia, N.U. (2021), "Responsible leadership an obstacle for turnover intention", *Social Responsibility Journal*, Vol. 17 No. 8, pp. 1175–1192, doi: 10.1108/SRJ-03-2020-0092.
- Yusoff, A. (2025), "Advancing positive leadership: an integrative review and development of the adaptive positive leadership (APL) model", *Strategy & Leadership*, doi: 10.1108/SL-04-2025-0071.
- Zhang, Y. and Zhang, L.J. (2024), "'Good for me to Leave it for Good': A Longitudinal Study on How Emotion Labor in Teaching Contributes to a Beginning EFL Teacher's Resignation", *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 58 No. 4, pp. 1460–1492, doi: 10.1002/tesq.3289.

Appendix A: Search approach and screening logic

Databases searched: Scopus; Web of Science; Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).

Time window and limits: 2014-2025 (inclusive), English language, peer-reviewed journal articles

Keyword blocks used (iterative search):

Searches combined keyword blocks, iteratively refined during screening for relevance to research questions:

- Turnover terms (action words): turnover, quit, resign, attrition, retention
- Leadership terms (leader nouns): leader, supervisor, manager, leader-member exchange, leadership
- Organisational terms: salary, compensation, work design, workload, job demands-resources, career progression

Screening process:

- Stage 1: Title and abstract screening to remove clearly irrelevant items
- Stage 2: Full-text assessment for fit with the two research questions (leadership influences on turnover and comparison with organisational factors)

Inclusion criteria:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles, English language
- Organisational employment settings
- Examined leadership or managerial behaviours and/or organisational factors in relation to turnover

Exclusion criteria:

- Non-organisational settings
- Non-peer-reviewed sources

Appendix B: Credibility appraisal approach (non-scoring)

A formal quality scoring tool was not applied due to heterogeneity in research designs across the included studies. Instead, methodological credibility was considered during extraction using the following criteria:

- Design clarity: the study aim, setting, sample, and design were described clearly enough to interpret the findings
- Transparency of measures and analysis: key constructs (turnover outcome and predictors) and analytic approach were reported with adequate transparency (including reliability/validity information where relevant)
- Conclusions supported by results: conclusions were clearly grounded in the reported findings and limitations were acknowledged where appropriate.

These criteria were used to guide interpretation and weighting of evidence in the narrative synthesis, rather than to exclude studies.

Appendix C: PRISMA Diagram

