

## Discovering Leadership Styles to Address the Talent Retention in IT Sector : A Review of Literature

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i2/20733>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i2/20733

**Published Date:** 12 February 2024

### Abstract

The information technology (IT) industry is increasingly concerned about talent loss, as this issue can seriously affect its market competitiveness and sustainability. It is not easy to address this issue in a dynamic and technology-driven IT environment. An increasing number of leaders have refocused their attention on leadership styles. This article employs a literature review methodology to synthesize and analyse the impact of different leadership style (transformative leadership, servant leadership, democratic leadership, coaching leadership and transactional leadership) on talent retention in the IT industry, and ultimately identifies the leadership styles that are relatively effective in that specific industry. This study initially focuses on discussing and analyzing the common leadership styles in the IT industry and the potential influence of each leadership style on talent retention. These leadership styles have contributed to talent retention by increasing talent job satisfaction and organizational loyalty. The outcomes of this research are anticipated to provide direction and counsel to leaders in the IT sector on their leadership styles, enhancing comprehension of the challenges relating to talent retention, as well as enabling them to effectively address the problems associated with talent retention. What's more, the aim is to bolster the fundamental competitive advantage of IT firms to attain long-term growth.

**Keywords:** Talent Retention, IT Industry, Transformative Leadership, Servant Leadership, Democratic Leadership

### Introduction

In the fast-changing IT industry, if an organization faces a serious issue of talent loss, it will threaten its growth. Upon careful review of this challenge, leadership style is considered to be one of the determining factors (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). This study will focus on transformative leadership, servant leadership, democratic leadership, coaching leadership and transactional leadership. Based on the characteristics of these leadership styles, a wide range of skills and attributes are included that are required for leadership in the IT industry.

Through further in-depth research, it has been learnt about the practical applications, effects and limitations of various leadership styles in different IT enterprise environments. Among them, transformational leadership requires the highest level of innovation and foresight, servant leadership provides more care to employees; teamwork is emphasized in democratic leadership, coaching leadership puts employees' knowledge and skills, and career development in the first place, while transactional leadership focuses on rewards and punishments (Bwalya, 2023; Martinez & Leija, 2023). Collectively, they provide leaders with a multi-dimensional framework of choices, which allows them to select the most appropriate leadership style according to the organization's own situation (Prado et al., 2020).

Although a significant amount of literature has focused on leadership styles, there is still a knowledge gap for examining the comparative analysis of the comprehensive application of these leadership styles in the IT industry. Through in-depth research, this study will provide a comprehensive understanding and comparison of the actual effectiveness of several common leadership styles in addressing the challenges of the IT industry, and ultimately provide certain references for leaders and the industry. The study found that flexibility and adaptability embodied by leaders in their management practices contribute to the growth of organisations in the IT industry. Transformational leadership, servant leadership and democratic leadership are considered to be the most effective leadership styles in the IT industry due to their characteristics (Xie, 2020; Deng et al., 2023; Sareen & Agarwal, 2016). This finding will provide constructive guidance to IT leaders in their management practices, as well as enhance the understanding of leadership styles in talent management in the IT industry.

### **Literature Review**

Examining the role of leadership styles can help solve the problem of talent loss in the IT industry.

Leadership is the ability of a person or a group to skillfully guide, motivate, and exert control over others in order to achieve a common goal or objective. Leadership covers the act of establishing a clear path, making informed choices, and inspiring and organizing others towards a shared objective. The process is intricate and ever-changing, exhibiting various styles and methods (Bolden & Gosling, 2023). Leadership traits commonly encompass attributes like as foresight, effective communication, firm decision-making, flexibility, empathy, and the capacity to inspire and enable others (Northouse, 2021). The function of leadership is crucial in influencing the degree of employee satisfaction, engagement, and commitment within a company (Eliyana & Ma Arif, 2019). Common leadership styles in the IT business include transformational leadership, servant leadership, democratic leadership, coaching leadership, and transactional leadership. These elements are essential for enhancing staff satisfaction and engagement, eventually leading to improved retention of IT talent (Cerutti et al., 2020).

### **Transformative Leadership**

Transformative leadership characterized by the ability to inspire and motivate others to achieve exceptional performance and personal growth (Schiuma et al., 2021). Transformational leaders prioritize the development of individuals and teams, as well as actively engage in communication and interaction with team members to foster creativity and innovation (Caldwell et al., 2012). This approach empowers subordinates to contribute beyond their own self-interests. The implementation of transformational leadership in the IT

business is of utmost significance. An analysis of 420 workers in the Indian IT sector revealed that transformational leadership plays a vital part in inspiring subordinates to fully engage in their job, resulting in heightened employee satisfaction. This leadership style fosters the passion and commitment of talented individuals to the organization by highlighting common ideals, hence enhancing the retention of talent (Mittal, 2016). Another research conducted in Pakistan's IT industry confirmed that transformative leadership improves the retention of talent by facilitating information exchange, gaining organizational support, and fostering a goal-oriented learning environment (Rehmani et al., 2023). Furthermore, transformative leaders foster collaboration and a common vision, enabling workers to recognize the significance of their contributions towards the overall objectives of the business (Nauman et al., 2021). Transformative leadership is a very effective method for retaining talent in the IT business. It not only enhances team performance but also supports the personal and professional growth of individuals.

### **Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership revolves around the leader perceiving themselves primarily as a servant to their team, emphasizing the needs and growth of their team members. The servant leadership style, created by Robert K. Greenleaf during the 1970s, focuses on a leader's modesty, attentiveness, understanding, compassion, and dedication to the development of their people both personally and professionally (Rachmawati & Lantu, 2014). Servant leaders often concentrate the welfare of their team members and lead the entire team by setting a personal example. They often guide by fostering empowerment and incentive, rather than relying on authority and control (Mcquade et al., 2020). This leadership style holds significant importance in the IT industry. A research confirmed the correlation between the servant leadership model and employees work attitudes and trust in the leader within the IT industry in India. A literature review study indicated that servant leadership enhances job satisfaction of subordinates by demonstrating traits such as listening, communication, trust, and empathy towards them (Mcquade et al., 2020). A study with a sample of 307 Chinese employees, including Internet, IT and others, showed that servant leadership promotes innovative behaviours. Because this style of leadership focuses on fostering an open and collaborative organisational culture during the work process, it is significant for the personal development of employees and the emergence of innovative behaviours that enhance employee satisfaction and loyalty (Jin et al., 2022). Under servant leadership, employees often feel concerned and valued, even regarded as appreciated, which reduces the likelihood that they will leave, and thus enhances retention (Aggarwal et al., 2021). In conclusion, this leadership style can be selected as one of the effective strategies for talent retention in IT industry, especially more needed in knowledge and innovation oriented IT industry.

### **Democratic Leadership**

Democratic leadership is a style of leadership in which the leader makes decisions after discussing them with the participants (Nedelko & Potocan, 2021). Democratic leadership is characterized by encouraging group decision-making, assigning tasks that take into account the characteristics of the individual to match, giving subordinates more than enough choice and flexibility, and there is no psychological distance between the leader and subordinates (Hilton et al., 2021). The application of democratic leadership style in the IT industry is mainly in the form of involving the company's employees in the project planning and decision making process. It allows employees to feel valued and develops a sense of ownership (Porfírio et al.,

2021b). At the same time, such a leader will also actively exchange opinions and ideas with team members, which improves employees' motivation and work efficiency. The result is that they are more willing to stay in the company (Marques-Quinteiro et al., 2022). In addition, according to a study of leadership practices, a democratic leadership style is respectful of team members' management and contributions, which will create a supportive work environment. This not only increases their job satisfaction, but also promotes retention as a result (Raelin, 2021). Consequently, democratic leadership can also be used in the IT industry as an important measure to promote talent retention (Guinot et al., 2021).

### **Coaching Leadership**

Coaching leadership is a pattern of assisting employees to achieve their objectives on their own, enabling them to work with maximum creativity in the organization (Susanto & Sawitri, 2022). Coaching leaders are highly directive and supportive of their team members, assisting their subordinates in identifying problems and goals, and making decisions after consulting them. Communication between them is a two-way street with mutual feedback (Jung et al., 2023). On account of the dynamic characteristics of the IT industry, coaching leaders are aware of their employees' knowledge and skill gaps and are able to take appropriate approaches to maintain and enhance their knowledge and skills (Karlsen & Berg, 2020). Additionally, Since IT projects are generally complex, they often require teamwork to complete. Coaching leaders can foster and guide a culture of collaboration and enhance team contributions. It is conducive to improving employee satisfaction (Yuan et al., 2019). In conclusion, coaching leadership is also used in the IT industry as an effective intervention to retain key talent.

### **Transactional Leadership**

Transactional leadership is a type of leadership that is based on a transaction between the leader and subordinates, usually some sort of established tangible or intangible reward in exchange. (Bass et al., 2003). This type of leadership is results (performance) orientated, with a clearly defined division of roles and assignment of tasks in advance. There are clear requirements for everything, including time, place, process, goals, etc (Abbas & Ali, 2023b). An Indian study of the IT industry suggests that transactional leadership can be an effective strategy, as IT organizations need to achieve goals immediately and respond quickly when dealing with the completion of time-sensitive projects. Therefore, the result orientation and goal clarity of transactional leadership in this case will contribute to the retention of people who excel in this area (Sahyaja & Rao, 2020). Another study of 224 projects found that transactional leadership promotes project success, but requires clarity of purpose as a moderating influence. Employees gained a greater sense of achievement when projects were successful, which was more favourable to their retention in the company (Aga, 2016). In the IT industry, where collaborative innovation is required, a study of 245 employees and supervisors demonstrated the role of transactional leadership, which enhances the dynamics of an organisation's workforce through supervision, leading to a greater willingness to remain (Xu & Wang, 2019). A study from China centres on how organisational culture influences the link between IT-business process alignment and transactional leadership. The study demonstrates the role that entrepreneurial aberrant behaviour management and contingent rewards have in enabling IT-business process alignment, which in turn indirectly impacts talent retention and satisfaction (Wang et al., 2021). In sum, transactional leadership can also be intervened in the IT industry as a method of retaining talent in some specific situations.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The above synthesis discusses five types of leadership styles typically found in the IT industry. Each of these can contribute positively to the retention of talent in the IT business to a certain degree.

The Table 1 presents a comprehensive synopsis of the pertinent research associated with the five leadership styles examined in this work. It includes details such as the authors and publication year, sources, methodology, sample size, and conclusions. The purpose of this table is to facilitate the identification of the features and application context of each leadership style based on the findings of these studies. The literature identifies Transformational Leadership, Servant Leadership, and Democratic Leadership as the three most often used leadership styles in the IT business.

In the IT industry, transformative, servant, and democratic leadership styles tend to be more effective than coaching and transformational leadership styles (Akbar et al., 2021; Spears & Lawrence, 2002; Xie, 2020). The IT sector demands innovation, collaboration, and agility in response to rapid changes. Transformative, servant, and democratic leaders have superior abilities to foster these components, therefore enhancing their effectiveness in fostering talent retention (Fisher, 2005; Thite, 2000). While coaching and transactional leaders can aid in personal growth and job completion (Passmore (2015); Thite (2000b)), they may not be adequate to effectively address the swift transformations and inventive requirements of the IT sector.

Table 1

*Comparative Analysis of Leadership Styles and Their Effectiveness in Talent Retention*

Author/Year	Source	Leadership Type	Methodology/Sample	Findings
(Caldwell et al., 2012)	WOS	Transformative leadership	Conceptual	Transformative leadership combines the personal rapport of charismatic leadership, the modesty and determination of Level 5 leadership, the alignment of values in principle-centered leadership, the focus on serving stakeholders in servant leadership, and the significance and collaborative change of transformational and covenantal leadership.
(Murali & Aggarwal, 2020)	Scopus	Transformative	Researching the information and communication technology industry (ICT) industry in the UAE	Transformational Leadership enhances talent retention through positive leadership on employee engagement and employee performance.
(Dwiedienawati, 2020)	Scopus	Transformative leadership	Descriptive quantitative study: 252 respondents in Indonesia were analysed.	Transformational leadership has a positive effect on organisational talent retention in turbulent environments.
(Bass, 2010)	Scopus	Transformative leadership	Conceptual	Transformational leaders are more effective in a wide

				range of industries.
(Akbar et al., 2021)	Scopus	Transactional and transformational leadership	Qualitative research: interviews with 149 of 119 IT companies in Indonesia.	The results of this study suggest that transformational leaders are more holistic than transactional leaders. This research enhances the current body of knowledge by examining the influence of successful transformational leadership on the performance and work satisfaction of organisational members, specifically in terms of fostering high-quality leader-member interactions.
(Bass et al., 2003)	WOS	Transformational and transactional leadership	Empirical studies	Transactional leadership is more practical in organisations with strict hierarchies, and transformational leaders are able to predict organisational performance to enhance satisfaction.
(Ramalu & Kalimuthu, 2022)	Scopus	Servant leadership	Survey of 300 employees in the IT industry	The relationship between servant leadership and talent retention can be both direct and indirect, while moderated

				through job embedding.
(Eva et al., 2019)	WOS	Servant leadership	Literature review	The article sorts out the importance of servant leadership on a team and organisational level.
(Hassan, 2022)	Scopus	Servant leadership	Quantitative Research on Millennial Employees in the Private Sector	A substantial beneficial association exists between servant leadership and talent retention rates.
(Bande et al., 2019)	WOS	Servant leadership	An empirical study of 145 employees and supervisors from 145 companies from different industries.	This study highlights the fact that servant leadership employs trust to mould a good working atmosphere, which ultimately improves talent retention.
(Saleem et al., 2020)	WOS	Servant leadership	An empirical study: a study of a dichotomous sample of 233 pairs of subordinates and supervisors.	Servant leadership influences talent retention by predicting subordinates' emotional newcomers, organisational citizenship behaviours and task performance.
(Roberts, 2020)	Scopus	Servant leadership	Conceptual framework	This study demonstrates its positive impact on servant leadership attributes for effective organisational change.



(Harwardt, 2020)	Scopus	Servant leadership	Conceptual framework	Servant leadership has a significant impact on the success of IT projects.
(Hilton et al., 2021)	Scopus	Democratic leadership	Quantitative studies: Data from 476 employees was an	A strong positive association exists between democratic leadership and organizational effectiveness.
(Nedelko & Potocan, 2021)	WOS	Democratic leadership	Empirical research: 208 Slovenian and Austrian leaders were analysed in this study.	Democratic leadership behaviours contribute to sustainable organisational development.
(Foels et al., 2000)	WOS	Democratic leadership	Conceptual framework	Democratic leadership is more satisfying for the team.
(Markopoulos et al., 2020)	WOS	Democratic leadership	Conceptual framework	The democratic leadership change integration model can maximise the intellectual capital of SMEs to promote innovation.
(Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. 2002).	WOS	Democratic leadership Coaching leadership	Empirical analyses	A democratic leadership encourages the active participation of team members to achieve organisational goals; A coaching leadership accomplishes organisational goals by motivating team members to

				contribute their knowledge and skills.
(Costa et al., 2023)	Scopus	Transformational Leadership, Democratic Leadership, Transactional Leadership	Empirical study: analysis of a sample of 12,702 companies in Portugal.	Transactional leadership hurts firm innovation, while transformational and democratic leadership has a positive impact on firm innovation.
(Udin, 2023)	Scopus	Transformational Leadership, Democratic Leadership, Transactional Leadership	Literature review	Transformational leadership, democratic leadership, and transactional leadership then have a positive effect on employee job satisfaction and engagement. Transformational leadership is more dominant than the other two in the context of this study (Indonesia).
(Jung et al., 2023)	WOS	Coaching leadership	Empirical study: a study of 372 employees from Korean organisations.	Coaching leadership can act as a buffer to reduce job insecurity, and it is a moderating variable between job insecurity and talent turnover intentions.
(Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014)	WOS	Coaching leadership	Focus groups and a theoretical review, this study was a mixed study using data from leaders of a six-month mentoring	Coaching leadership is considered a promising leadership style. Coaching leaders have a positive

			programme and a control group.	impact on subordinates' trust, and trust in subordinates is positively correlated with intention to leave.
(Solansky, 2010)	WOS	Coaching leadership	Empirical study	The potential benefits of leadership coaching lie in its ability to effectively tackle conventional obstacles encountered in leadership development programs. Leaders exhibit diverse experiences, talents, and learning styles while participating in a shared program.
(Berg & Karlsen, 2016)	WOS	Coaching leadership	Case Study: An analysis of a company using coaching techniques in project management.	The coaching leadership style is one of strengths, giving culture and self-management in the group.
(Yuan et al., 2019)	WOS	Coaching leadership	Empirical study: a sample of 287 employees and 72 team leaders in South China.	Encouraging managers to engage in coaching leadership helps to increase employees' psychological safety and openness to change, from improving employee voice behaviour

(Berkovich & Eyal, 2021)	WOS	Transactional & Transformational leadership	Conceptual	Transformational leadership predicts recourse to criticism and professional ethics, while transactional leadership suggests the usage of utilitarian ethics
(Young et al., 2021)	WOS	Transactional leadership	Meta-analysis: a study of force models based on social exchange theory and self-determination theory.	The indirect impacts of transactional leadership on follower performance can prove positive and negative.
(Abbas & Ali, 2023)	WOS	Transactional & Transformational leadership	A meta-analytic review	Transformational leadership has a greater impact on project success than transactional leadership
(Wang et al., 2021)	Scopus	Transactional leadership	Conceptual frameworks	The impact of transactional leadership on the consistency of IT business processes through contingent rewards and leader abnormal behaviour management as significant points.
(Sunarsi et al., 2021)	Scopus	Transactional & Transformational leadership	Empirical study: quantitative questionnaire analysis of 337 IT employees in Banten.	In the IT industry, transformational leadership has a positive and significant impact on employee satisfaction, while transactional leadership has no impact on

				employee satisfaction.
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### Conclusion

The aim of this study is to offer valuable insights on leadership styles that can enhance talent retention in the IT sector. By examining five distinct leadership styles, including transformative leadership, servant leadership, democratic leadership, coaching leadership, and transactional leadership. The findings of this study indicate that transformative leadership, servant leadership, and democratic leadership are the most effective approaches for addressing the issue of talent loss in the IT industry.

This study mostly relied on literature reviews and case analyses, without much empirical evidence from extensive-scale investigations. To improve the reliability and generalizability of the results, future study should utilize a wider variety of research methodologies and incorporate a more diverse spectrum of studies. The leadership styles in organisations may be shaped by taking into account the characteristics of the organisation's size and organisational structure. This study does not delve into the practical details between IT firms with different organisational structures, and therefore the reference should be carefully chosen based on the actual situation in which the firms operate. Despite the limitations mentioned above, the findings of this study can still provide important insight into the relationship between leadership style and talent retention in the IT industry. Considering the importance of the relationship between them for practical applications, these constraints will also be progressively addressed in future research endeavours.

### Acknowledgement

I would like to convey my gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Theresa Char Fei Ho and Dr. Teo Poh Teo, Dr. Shathees Baskaran, for their unwavering support, which have been of immense value throughout this research. Their unwavering instruction and profound understanding have facilitated the advancement of our investigation. I like to convey my profound appreciation to them for their diligent efforts and altruistic commitment.

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