



Why Employees Recommend Their Employer: Key Factors Driving Job Satisfaction at a Public University Hospital

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This paper identifies key organizational drivers of job satisfaction and employer recommendation in public hospitals, addressing the lack of studies jointly examining these outcomes in a single model.

Aims(s) – The primary aim of this paper is to identify which organizational factors most influence employees' job satisfaction and their willingness to recommend their employer in a public hospital setting. A secondary aim is to assess the extent to which job satisfaction mediates the relationship between these factors and organizational attractiveness.

Design/methodology/approach – The study relies on a cross-sectional survey to collect data from 5,535 participants. Data was analyzed using PLS-SEM to test both direct and mediating relationships between seven organizational factors and two outcomes (job satisfaction and willingness to recommend one's employer).

Findings – Our model demonstrates strong explanatory power for job satisfaction and employees' willingness to recommend their employer. Value congruence and leadership & communication emerge as key positive predictors of satisfaction, while organizational support and value congruence are the strongest predictors of employees' willingness to recommend their employer. Job satisfaction also plays a significant mediating role in linking organizational factors to the willingness to recommend one's employer. Leadership and communication negatively impact on the willingness to recommend employers despite their positive influence on job satisfaction.

Limitations of the study – The research is cross-sectional, limiting causal inference. Both predictors and outcomes were measured via self-reported, single-source data. The study was conducted in one Swiss public hospital, limiting generalizability.

Originality/value – This paper offers a novel, integrative model linking multiple HRM practices to job satisfaction and employer recommendation in a public healthcare setting. It contributes to the public HRM literature by operationalizing employer attractiveness and by quantifying the mediating role of job satisfaction using a large sample and robust PLS-SEM methodology.

KEY WORDS

job satisfaction, willingness to recommend employer, organizational support, value congruence, leadership and communication

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1 INTRODUCTION

Human resource (HR) professionals are increasingly concerned about employee shortages (Heisler & Bandow, 2018; Wójcik, 2018), with many economic sectors struggling to attract, recruit, and retain staff (Bite et al., 2020; Gelencsér et al., 2023). This issue is particularly pronounced in high-priority fields such as information technology (IT), engineering, catering, tourism, and healthcare (Butler et al., 2024; Rolewicz et al., 2024; Van Merode et al., 2024).

Public hospitals face a significant and ongoing challenge due to persistent employee shortages and increasing competition from private sector organizations. This issue has intensified in recent years, with widespread concerns over staff retention and recruitment exacerbated by factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and shifting labor market dynamics (Butler et al., 2024; Rolewicz et al., 2024).

Recent studies emphasize the need for innovative strategies to stem the tide of healthcare resignations and improve retention (Gelencsér et al., 2023; de Vries et al., 2023). Furthermore, systematic reviews highlight the complexity of estimating healthcare workforce shortages and underscore the urgent need for sustainable staffing solutions (Parzonka et al., 2023). In this context, filling newly created or vacant positions in public hospitals has become increasingly difficult.

The issue of public hospitals' attractiveness to employees concerns both HR professionals and the public, as staff shortages can seriously degrade health services. It is also an intellectual quandary that helps HR professionals find solutions to attract and retain staff members. The scientific literature shows that employees who are satisfied with their working conditions are more attached to their organization and are more likely to recommend it as an employer (Cantarelli et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2019). In addition, job satisfaction was identified in a recent literature review as a major lever for ensuring staff retention in hospitals (de Vries et al., 2023). Thus, it is crucial to identify the factors that contribute the most to the satisfaction of public hospital employees and encourage them to recommend their organization.

Our research questions were as follows: Which work-related factors most influence employee satisfaction in a large Swiss public hospital? What motivates employees to recommend their employers to others? Additionally, can satisfaction mediate the relationship between work-related factors and the intention to recommend an employer?

According to social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964), if employees believe that their organization provides conditions conducive to professional fulfillment and satisfaction, they are more likely to recommend their employer to others. Our field study, which involved a questionnaire survey of employees at a large public university hospital in Switzerland, collected over 5,500 (N = 5,535) valid responses from 13,436 employees, yielding a 41.2% return rate. Such a large sample size is rare in scientific research, which is a notable strength of our survey. Additionally, the survey allowed us to integrate various factors explaining satisfaction and the willingness to recommend an employer. In a single statistical analysis, we considered factors such as available material resources, time constraints, work schedule flexibility, value congruence, perceived organizational support, leadership and communication, and training and promotion opportunities.

This study contributes significantly to both science and practice by identifying the antecedents of job satisfaction (JS) and employee loyalty, measured through employees' willingness to recommend their employer (WRE). It provides practitioners with actionable strategies to enhance their organization's attractiveness to potential employees and retain current staff, particularly in the context of a public university hospital. Additionally, this article fosters dialogue on hospital resources to address staff shortages and improve attractiveness. This paper is structured as follows: first, a review of the theoretical framework and an introduction to the research hypotheses. Next, an examination of factors in the empirical analysis is presented. The methodological procedures used to test the research model and explore variable relationships are then discussed. Following this, the main results are analyzed and discussed. Finally, the study's limitations are addressed, and potential avenues for future research are proposed.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 A SOCIAL EXCHANGE PERSPECTIVE

Social Exchange Theory (SET) originates from anthropology, sociology, and social psychology (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and describes the "voluntary actions of individuals motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do bring from others" (Blau, 1964, p. 91). Central to this theory is the norm of reciprocity, which posits that human activities operate through giving and receiving mechanisms (Gouldner, 1960). Individuals are thus engaged in interdependent relationships in which they exchange economic and social goods (e.g., support and friendship), expecting reciprocation either immediately or in the future. These exchanges strengthen social bonds and build trust within the group. However, trust can be compromised if one party fails to meet its moral obligation to reciprocate.

SET has been frequently utilized in workplace research. In addition to economic exchanges (e.g., salary for job tasks), social exchanges between employers and employees occur in all organizations, including private companies, public administrations, and hospitals. Studies indicate that when employers value,

support, and consider employees' needs, they adopt positive attitudes and behaviors towards the organization. A supportive organizational context is often seen as a sign of the employer's consideration of staff. Consequently, employees reciprocate with higher JS and increased motivation, work engagement, and commitment (Bauwens et al., 2021; Mostafa, 2017). These attitudes enhance job performance and foster organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Borst et al., 2020; De Geus et al., 2020).

Our study utilizes the theoretical framework of SET to elucidate the connections between our independent variables and our outcomes, namely JS and WRE. Prior research in hospital environments has demonstrated the beneficial impact of supportive working conditions on employee attitudes and behaviors (Giauque, 2015; Giauque, 2016). Based on this, we formulate the following hypotheses.

2.2 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The dependent variables of our model were respondents' JS and WRE. The selection of independent variables, which potentially explain these outcomes, was based on previous literature and the interests expressed by the HR department of the public hospital during questionnaire preparation. Consequently, the variable selection was driven by theoretical, practical, and managerial considerations.

2.2.1 TRAINING & PROMOTION

For decades, large organizations, such as hospitals, have utilized various personnel management practices to promote behaviors that align with organizational goals (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Jain & Purohit, 2022; Nutley & Davies, 2001). Addressing training and professional development (T&D) needs indicates an employer's commitment to maintaining trust and mutual respect with staff. Enhancing employees' knowledge, skills, and career advancement fulfills psychological needs, such as autonomy and peer recognition, leading to professional satisfaction (Gould-Williams & Mostafa, 2021). Consequently, satisfied employees reciprocate with their positive work attitudes. Numerous studies on public administration have shown a positive correlation between these practices and JS. In hospitals, development opportunities significantly influence employees' perceptions of employer attractiveness (Trybou et al., 2014). Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1a: Training and promotion are positively related to job satisfaction.

H1b: Training and promotion are positively related to willingness to recommend the employer.

2.2.2 ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

SET posits that employee-organization relationships are based on resource exchange, while organizational support theory focuses on employees' perceptions of organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Employees assess the organization's appreciation of their contributions and concerns about their well-being. The literature suggests that benevolent management, fair procedures, and working conditions that respect well-being and health contribute to employees' support. Research demonstrates that perceived organizational support (POS) positively correlates with attitudes, such as work engagement and organizational commitment, and behaviors, including in-role performance and OCB (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Lee & Peccei, 2011).

Empirical evidence from hospital settings demonstrates that employees' POS leads to a higher likelihood of recommending the organization (Lejeune et al., 2020; Slåtten & Lien, 2022; Trybou et al., 2014). Based on these findings and the extensive literature on POS, we hypothesize the following:

H2a: Organizational support is positively related to job satisfaction.

H2b: Organizational support is positively related to willingness to recommend an employer.

2.2.3 LEADERSHIP & COMMUNICATION

Teamwork dominates organizations, necessitating relationships between leaders and team members and among team members themselves. These relationships thrive with effective multilateral

communication, both formal and informal, allowing stakeholders to share and receive essential information for work and organizational efficiency. Open communication enhances relationships between managers and subordinates, and within teams (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2021). The quality of these relationships was assessed using two concepts: Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and Team Member Exchange (TMX). LMX describes interactions between leaders and subordinates, with high-quality relationships marked by strong support, honesty, and exchanges from the leader, prompting subordinates to adopt favorable attitudes and behaviors towards the organization (Banks et al., 2014). TMX addresses the quality of reciprocity among team members, in which high-quality relationships foster positive professional attitudes (Banks et al., 2014). Therefore, high LMX and TMX are expected to enhance JS and WRE, leading to the following hypotheses:

H3a: Leadership and communication are positively related to job satisfaction.

H3b: Leadership and communication are positively related to willingness to recommend an employer.

2.2.4 TIME CONSTRAINTS

Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics model posits that JS arises when individuals experience meaningfulness, responsibility for organizational outcomes, and awareness of their work results. These states are achieved through skill variety, task identity, significance, autonomy and feedback. A perceived lack of time for task completion can lead to job dissatisfaction owing to the inability to focus on significant tasks, thus reducing fulfillment. This is particularly true when one is compelled to perform menial tasks rather than varied tasks of greater significance. In Australian long-term care, nurses' and assistants-in-nursing's perceptions of insufficient time with residents resulted in decreased JS (Moyle et al., 2003). While no empirical research links time pressure to WRE, we hypothesize that high time pressure and workload, combined with poor work-life balance, reduce WRE due to POS deficiencies. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H4a: Time constraints are negatively related to job satisfaction.

H4b: Time constraints are negatively related to willingness to recommend the employer.

2.2.5 WORK SCHEDULE FLEXIBILITY

Autonomy in a job is a key element of Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics model, defined by Fields (2002, p. 67) as "the extent to which a job provides the employee with discretion to choose how the work is done and to set the schedule for completing the work activities." Keene and Quadagno (2004) emphasized that job autonomy is crucial for predicting work-family balance. Respect and equitable treatment in work hours positively impact perceived well-being, particularly among parents (Estes, 2016; Ezra & Deckman, 1996; Jang, 2009) and younger employees (Galinsky & Matos, 2011), as well as JS (Galinsky & Matos, 2011; Jang, 2009; Jang et al., 2011).

Flexibility in work schedules is essential for enhancing employee responsibility and positively affecting motivation, performance, and JS (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Furthermore, it demonstrates employer appreciation of employees' needs, potentially boosting organizational appeal through employee referrals. Consequently, we propose the following hypotheses:

H5a: Work schedule flexibility is positively related to job satisfaction.

H5b: Work schedule flexibility is positively related to the willingness to recommend an employer.

2.2.6 VALUE CONGRUENCE

Building on SET, various theories in the management literature elucidate employee alignment with work environments (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; O'Reilly et al., 1991; Chatman, 1989; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; O'Reilly et al., 1991; Tom, 1971). Research indicates that P-O fit predicts organizational commitment and stress levels (Verquer et al., 2003), even in settings such as Swiss public hospitals (Giauque et al., 2014). Additionally,

employees sharing organizational values perceive the organization as an attractive employer and are more likely to recommend it (Ritz et al., 2023). Consequently, we propose the following hypotheses:

H6a: Value congruence is positively related to job satisfaction.

H6b: Value congruence is positively related to the willingness to recommend an employer.

2.2.7 PERCEIVED USEFULNESS OF RESOURCES

A significant variable that may impact JS and WRE involves the resources provided to employees to perform their tasks. While seemingly related to POS, this factor specifically addresses employees' perceptions of managerial tools, practices, rules, and the overall resources necessary for their work. This factor is related to two key factors. First, the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) suggests that employees who perceive a lack of resources and face high organizational demands are more likely to experience dissatisfaction and stress, making them less inclined to recommend their employer (Bauwens et al., 2021; Kim & Wang, 2018). Second, it pertains to the bureaucratic nature of the job, where managerial practices and tools may be viewed as unhelpful or red tape (Giacomelli et al., 2022; Giauque et al., 2013; Hill & Plimmer, 2024; Steijn & Voet, 2019). Employees' perceptions of these managerial tools and practices as either practical resources or bureaucratic constraints can influence their JS and WRE differently. Additionally, recent research indicates that bureaucratic constraints or red tape, defined as compliance burden and non-functional rules, are linked to decreased organizational performance (Van Loon, 2017), justifying the inclusion of this variable in the present study.

H7a: Perceived usefulness of resources is positively related to job satisfaction.

H7b: Perceived usefulness of resources is positively related to willingness to recommend an employer.

2.2.8 JOB SATISFACTION: A PROCESS THROUGH WHICH INDEPENDENT VARIABLES AFFECT ORGANIZATION RECOMMENDATION

Few studies have explored the link between JS and WRE. However, a previous study from the private sector shows a positive correlation between JS and WRE (Van Hove, 2013). Similarly, research in hospitals indicates that satisfied employees are more inclined to recommend their employers to acquaintances (Stockman et al., 2020). These findings suggest that JS may mediate the relationship between our independent variables and WRE. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H8a: Job satisfaction is positively related to willingness to recommend an employer.

H8b: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between independent variables and willingness to recommend an employer.

3 METHODS

3.1 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH AND SAMPLE

We tested our hypotheses through a questionnaire survey conducted at a major Swiss public hospital, which we do not name to ensure confidentiality. This public university hospital offers both general and advanced services, and it aims to train future doctors. The survey, conducted from June 20 to September 5, 2022, involved an anonymous online questionnaire distributed via the Qualtrics platform to all hospital staff, with the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS) ensuring data confidentiality and respondent anonymity. Reminder emails were sent to non-respondents on July 7, August 3, and August 23, 2022. Out of 13,436 individuals contacted, 6,844 completed the online questionnaire and 99 completed the paper version. With 5,443 online and 92 paper responses usable, yielding an overall response rate of 41.2%, which is notably high for such surveys.

The details of the respondents, compared to the overall population, are as follows:

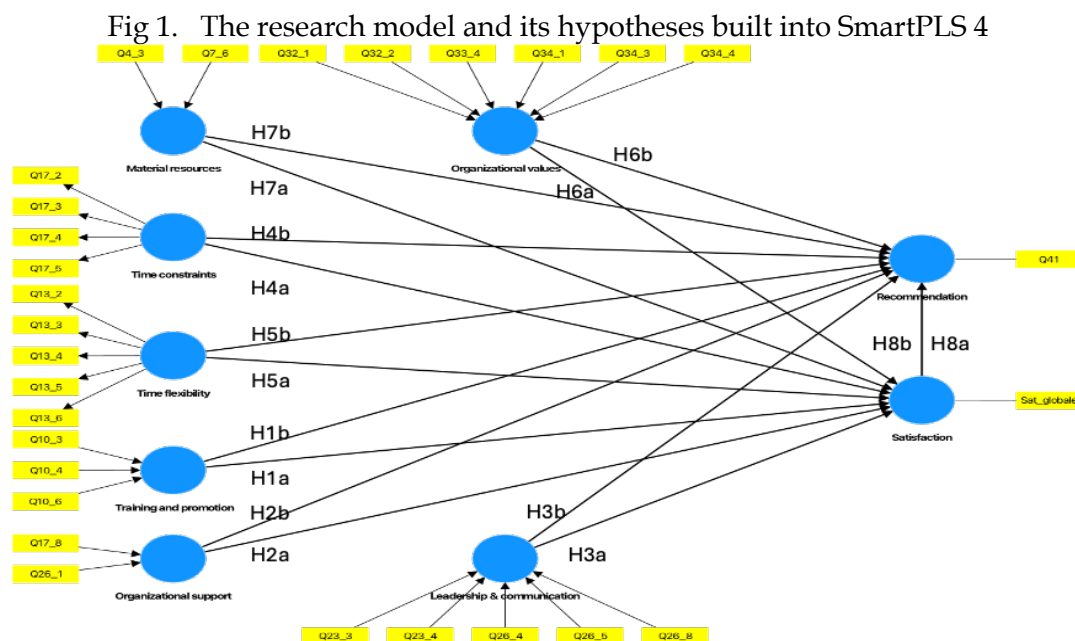
Table 1. Sample and population description

	Survey sample		Actual figures provided by the hospital
	Number	%	%
Gender			
Female	3,638	66%	68%
Male	1,815	33%	32%
Non-binary	56	1%	NA
Total (missing)	5,509 (26)	100%	100%
Age			
Under 20 years old	10	0%	0%
20 to 29 years old	495	9%	11%
30 to 39 years old	1,379	25%	28%
40 to 49 years old	1,674	30%	26%
50 to 59 years old	1,577	29%	27%
60 years old and over	372	7%	8%
Total (missing)	5,507 (28)	100%	100%
Education			
Compulsory school	268	5%	NA
Federal Certificate of Competence (CFC)	889	16%	NA
Federal diploma	578	11%	NA
Bachelor's degree from a University of Applied Sciences (HES)	1,174	22%	NA
Master's degree from a University of Applied Sciences (HES)	144	3%	NA
University bachelor's degree (half-bachelor's degree)	138	2%	NA
Master's degree	578	11%	NA
Post-graduate diploma (CAS, MAS, etc.)	968	18%	NA
PhD	677	12%	NA
Total (missing)	5,414 (121)	100%	NA
Tenure			
Less than one year	280	5%	4%
From 1 to less than 3 years	701	13%	18%
From 3 to less than 5 years	583	11%	12%
From 5 to less than 10 years	1,023	18%	20%
Over 10 years	2,923	53%	46%
Total (missing)	5,510 (25)	100%	100%

Organizational behavior research often faces methodological biases, particularly with self-administered questionnaires (Podsakoff et al., 2003), potentially threatening the validity of observed relationships and conclusions (Pandey et al., 2008; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Effective questionnaire design, clear data collection strategies, and post hoc data analysis can mitigate and verify that measurement biases are minimal or nonexistent. We ensured the complete anonymity of respondents (Pandey et al., 2008), provided a study description, and reminded participants of scientific ethics. Respondents were urged to answer freely with assurance that their information would remain confidential. While this is often unnecessary with the PLS-SEM method owing to the lack of distributional assumptions (Hair et al., 2019), we conducted post hoc statistical tests such as skewness and kurtosis to ensure normality. Additionally, our measurement and structural models were tested to meet PLS-SEM standards in HR management (Hair et al., 2019).

3.2 MEASURES

Figure 1 presents all the variables and items included in our research model. Our analysis model includes two dependent variables and seven independent variables. All items in our questionnaire were developed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) very dissatisfied to (5) very satisfied unless otherwise specified.



3.3 DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Job satisfaction (JS) was assessed using a single-item global measure. This approach is well-established in the literature and has demonstrated comparable reliability and validity to multi-item scales when measuring overall satisfaction (Dolbier et al., 2005; Nagy, 2002; Wanous et al., 1997). The item was formulated as follows: "In the end, your overall satisfaction in your unit/team is?" Responses ranged from 0% to 100%, with 11 levels of satisfaction. Given the unidimensional nature of global JS and the large sample size of this study, a single-item measure was deemed appropriate.

Willingness to recommend an employer (WRE) was assessed using a single-item measure: "Would you recommend your organization as an employer?" Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) no to (5) yes. This method aligns with the Net Promoter Score (NPS) framework commonly used to gauge recommendation behaviors (Reichheld, 2003) and is consistent with practices in both academic and applied research for measuring global attitudes toward employers (Fisher et al., 2016). While multi-item scales can provide greater psychometric precision, the single-item approach offers clarity and efficiency, particularly in large-scale organizational surveys.

3.4 INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

All independent variables in this study were modeled as formative constructs, where each item captures distinct dimensions of the broader concept. Following guidelines for formative measurement (Hair et al., 2019), internal consistency measures (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) were not reported, as these indicators are not expected to be interchangeable or highly correlated.

Perceived usefulness of resources. This construct was measured with two items developed specifically for this study in collaboration with the hospital's HR department. The items focused on respondents' satisfaction with the managerial tools and organizational resources available for performing their tasks. These items were designed to reflect the hospital's specific operational context and address resource adequacy as perceived by staff.

Time constraints. This construct was measured using four items assessing stress caused by time pressure in the workplace. These items were adapted from the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and tailored to reflect factors causing stress in our specific hospital environment, such as tight deadlines, overtime, long working hours, and work-life balance. They were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, from (1) not at all to (5) very much.

Work schedule flexibility. This construct was measured using four items assessing satisfaction with work-hour arrangements. Items were inspired by prior studies on work-life balance and flexible scheduling in healthcare contexts (de Vries et al., 2023), with modifications to align with the hospital's specific practices.

Value Congruence. This construct was measured with six items, partially adapted from the P-O fit literature (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; O'Reilly et al., 1991). Items were further customized in collaboration with the hospital's HR department to ensure alignment with the organization's value framework, capturing both identification with unit/team values and broader institutional values. They were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

Training and promotion. This construct was measured with three items addressing satisfaction with professional development opportunities, including coaching and supervision, time available for training, and career advancement. Items were developed for this study based on common HR practices and literature on high-performance work systems (Gould-Williams & Mostafa, 2021), ensuring relevance to the hospital's career development strategies.

Perceived organizational support (POS). This construct was measured with three items adapted from the Eisenberger et al. (1990) POS scale. Items were tailored to reflect both recognition and support quality as experienced in the hospital context.

Leadership and communication. This construct was measured with five items combining elements from LMX and TMX frameworks (Banks et al., 2014), as well as internal communication quality (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2021). Items were adapted and customized to assess both supervision quality and information flow relevant to hospital governance.

Given the formative nature of these constructs, the focus was placed on content validity, ensuring that the items collectively captured the breadth of each concept, rather than relying on internal consistency metrics.

3.5 STATISTICAL PROCEDURES

To test our hypotheses, we applied partial least-squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4. PLS-SEM is particularly effective for assessing models with numerous variables, which in our case are formative constructs. To validate the relevance of these formative constructs, we conducted confirmatory tetrad analyses with 10,000 subsamples, a two-tailed test at a 0.10 significance level and a fixed-seed random number generator. The results confirm that our constructs are better specified as formative rather than reflective, thus validating our choice of formative variables.

Given the characteristics of our research model, PLS-SEM is highly recommended for hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2017). Owing to the formative nature of our latent variables, we adhered to the suggested procedures for assessing our formative measurement model (Hair et al., 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2017). We were unable to conduct a redundancy analysis, typically the first step in formative model assessment, because our questionnaire lacked single items summarizing the various formative constructs. Although this omission could be seen as a limitation, we proceeded by running the standard PLS-SEM algorithm and controlling for variance inflation factor (VIF) values of all formative items. All VIF values were below the threshold of 5 (see Table 2 for collinearity statistics, outer model), indicating no collinearity issues. We then performed bootstrapping with 10,000 subsamples at the 5% significance level using the percentile bootstrapping method. This allowed us to verify the statistical significance of the item weights, which all proved significant, thus supporting the relevance and significance of the indicators in our PLS-SEM model. Additionally, we checked item loadings, all of which exceeded the 0.7 threshold and were significant.

Table 2. Collinearity statistics (VIF) - Outer model

Item	VIF
Q10_3	1.932
Q10_4	1.856
Q10_6	1.769
Q13_2	2.466
Q13_3	2.350
Q13_4	1.884
Q13_5	2.111
Q13_6	1.702
Q17_2	1.448
Q17_3	2.155

Q17_4	2.141
Q17_5	1.583
Q17_8	1.237
Q23_3	1.979
Q23_4	1.769
Q26_1	1.237
Q26_4	2.430
Q26_5	2.540
Q26_8	2.361
Q32_1	2.565
Q32_2	2.689
Q33_4	2.210
Q34_1	1.973
Q34_3	2.255
Q34_4	2.102
Q41	1.000
Q4_3	1.152
Q7_6	1.152
Sat_globale	1.000

We evaluated the structural model using the recommended steps. First, we applied the standard PLS-SEM algorithm to control for collinearity, with VIF values under three, indicating no collinearity issues (Table 3). We then performed bootstrapping (5% significance level and percentile bootstrapping method) to assess the path coefficients between variables in the PLS-SEM model. Most relationships were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The independent variables explained a substantial portion of the variance in JS (60.6%; R-square = 0.606) and WRE (48.8%; R-square = 0.488). We also controlled effect sizes (f-square), finding most values weak ($0.02 \leq f\text{-square} < 0.15$), with one moderate ($0.15 \leq f\text{-square} < 0.35$). These results indicate that our SEM model is relatively robust, although additional variables can potentially explain more variance in JS and WRE.

Table 3. Collinearity statistics (VIF) – Inner model

	VIF
Leadership & communication -> Recommendation	2.889
Leadership & communication -> Satisfaction	2.639
Material resources -> Recommendation	1.571
Material resources -> Satisfaction	1.551
Organizational support -> Recommendation	2.207
Organizational support -> Satisfaction	2.203
Value congruence -> Recommendation	2.874
Value congruence -> Satisfaction	2.423
Satisfaction -> Recommendation	2.539
Time constraints -> Recommendation	1.463
Time constraints -> Satisfaction	1.447
Work schedule flexibility -> Recommendation	1.751
Work schedule flexibility -> Satisfaction	1.744
Training and promotion -> Recommendation	1.772
Training and promotion -> Satisfaction	1.769

We sought to determine the predictive capacity of the PLS-SEM model (Legate et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2022). Using SmartPLS 4 software, we employed the PLSpredict/cross-validated predictive ability test (CVPAT) command for this purpose. Additionally, we examined statistical differences within our sample to identify any observed heterogeneity. To verify this, we performed a measurement invariance of composite model (MICOM) analysis (Hair et al., 2024) to ensure model invariance. Our analysis confirmed partial invariance, allowing us to conduct a multigroup analysis. This analysis identified significant differences in variable relationships based on respondents' positions or gender using permutation multigroup analyses.

Although PLS-SEM models are not intended for developing goodness-of-fit indices, we derived two significant indices using the PLS-SEM algorithm, namely the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and the normed fit index (NFI), indicating a good fit between our model and the data. The SRMR index was 0.044, which is below the threshold of 0.05, indicating a good fit. The NFI value was 0.918, above the 0.9 threshold, which is acceptable. These indicators confirmed that our model fit the data well.

Regarding the treatment of missing data, given that on certain items the threshold of more than 5% of missing data was reached, we chose the case-wise deletion method according to the recommendations in use (Hair et al., 2017).

4 RESULTS

4.1 MAIN ANTECEDENTS OF JOB SATISFACTION AND WILLINGNESS TO RECOMMEND EMPLOYER

Using bootstrapping, we updated the correlation coefficients between the independent and dependent variables in the model (Table 4). All independent variables are significantly correlated with JS at the 0.05% level. Value congruence shows a strong correlation with JS ($\beta = 0.421$; $p < 0.000$). Thus, *H6a* is supported by our data. Upward and downward communication, along with supervision, also have a significant impact on JS ($\beta = 0.314$; $p < 0.000$). Thus, our data supports *H3a*. The perceived usefulness of available resources has a weaker, yet statistically significant, relationship with JS ($\beta = 0.090$; $p < 0.000$), thus supporting *H7a*. Time constraints are negatively correlated with JS ($\beta = -0.078$; $p < 0.000$), indicating that a lack of sufficient time negatively affects JS, supporting *H4a*. Additionally, opportunities for work schedule flexibility are positively correlated with JS ($\beta = 0.056$; $p < 0.000$), supporting *H5a*. One unexpected result that we observe is the significant ($\beta = -0.05$; $p < 0.05$) negative relationship between POS (specifically the quality of support and recognition from hospital management) and JS. This result invalidates *H2a*. This may be attributed to the perception that hospital management is disconnected from on-the-ground realities. Additionally, training and promotion are significantly, albeit weakly, related to JS ($\beta = 0.031$; $p < 0.05$). Therefore, *H1a* is supported. The independent variables in our PLS-SEM explain 60.6% of the variance in JS, indicating that 39.4% of the variance remains unexplained, necessitating the inclusion of additional variables to fully analyze the determinants of JS.

Table 4. Path coefficients – Coefficients, Mean, Standard deviations, t values and p values

	Coefficient (β)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	t value	p value
Leadership & communication -> Recommendation	-0.073	-0.071	0.024	2.997	0.003
Leadership & communication -> Satisfaction	0.314	0.314	0.021	15.295	0.000
Material resources -> Recommendation	0.029	0.029	0.017	1.699	0.089
Material resources -> Satisfaction	0.090	0.090	0.015	6.058	0.000
Organizational support -> Recommendation	0.233	0.232	0.022	10.775	0.000
Organizational support -> Satisfaction	-0.040	-0.040	0.017	2.292	0.022
Value congruence -> Recommendation	0.229	0.230	0.025	9.304	0.000
Value congruence -> Satisfaction	0.421	0.422	0.021	20.501	0.000
Satisfaction -> Recommendation	0.294	0.293	0.024	12.042	0.000
Time constraints -> Recommendation	-0.048	-0.049	0.016	3.109	0.002
Time constraints -> Satisfaction	-0.078	-0.078	0.014	5.661	0.000
Work schedule flexibility -> Recommendation	0.070	0.070	0.019	3.759	0.000
Work schedule flexibility -> Satisfaction	0.050	0.050	0.015	3.230	0.001
Training and promotion -> Recommendation	0.026	0.027	0.018	1.503	0.133
Training and promotion -> Satisfaction	0.031	0.031	0.015	2.015	0.044

Based on our empirical findings, we went on to examine the factors influencing respondents' WRE. JS exhibits the highest correlation with WRE ($\beta = 0.294$; $p < 0.000$), indicating that higher JS increases the likelihood of recommending the hospital as an employer. This result supports *H8a* in the present study. Organizational support is the second most significant factor ($\beta = 0.233$; $p < 0.000$) to be correlated positively to WRE, followed by value congruence ($\beta = 0.229$; $p < 0.000$). *H2b* and *H6b* are therefore also

supported by our findings. Leadership and communication have a negative correlation with WRE ($\beta = -0.073$; $p < 0.003$), but they are strongly correlated with JS – a surprising result that warrants further investigation. Thus, *H3b* is not supported by our results. Work schedule flexibility is positively correlated with WRE ($\beta = 0.070$; $p < 0.000$), supporting *H5b*. Conversely, perceived usefulness of resources ($\beta = 0.029$; $p > 0.05$) and training and promotion opportunities ($\beta = 0.026$; $p > 0.1$) are not correlated with WRE in any statistically significant way. In this study, *H7b* and *H1b* are not supported by the data. Time constraints negatively impact WRE ($\beta = -0.048$; $p = 0.002$), confirming their adverse effect on organizational attractiveness and retention and supporting *H4b*. All independent variables, along with JS, account for 48.8% of the variance in WRE, leaving 51.2% unexplained by our PLS-SEM model, which is significant for management science studies.

4.2 MEDIATION ANALYSIS

Our PLS-SEM model identifies mediation effects between our independent variables and WRE, introducing mediation through JS. The results indicate that JS mediates the relationship between all independent variables and WRE, often as a complementary partial mediator. Specifically, JS acts as a partial and complementary mediator of value congruence, time constraints, work schedule flexibility, and training and promotion. However, we observe three exceptions. First, JS completely mediates the relationship between perceived usefulness of resources and WRE. Second, JS introduces competitive partial mediation for POS and WRE, thus reversing this correlation. While POS is positively related to WRE, its indirect effect through JS is negative ($\beta = -0.012$; $p < 0.05$). Third, the direct negative relationship between leadership and communication, and WRE becomes positive when JS is introduced as a mediator ($\beta = 0.092$; $p < 0.000$). Therefore, *H8b* is supported in the present study.

4.3 PREDICTIVE RELEVANCE OF THE PLS-PATH MODEL

We executed the PLSpredict/CVPAT with ten folds, ten repetitions, and fixed seeds. This procedure revealed that the q-square values for our latent variables were high (q-square > 0.45), indicating a strong predictive power for the WRE and JS variables (Table 5).

Table 5. Latent variables prediction summary – PLS-SEM

	Q ² predict	RMSE	MAE
Recommendation	0.450	0.742	0.577
Satisfaction	0.602	0.631	0.480

Additionally, the negative and statistically significant average loss differences (CVPAT-PLS-SEM vs. indicator average) show that PLS-SEM outperforms the indicator average benchmark for our dependent variables (WRE and JS) and the overall model. Thus, our PLS-SEM model demonstrates significantly better predictive power than the average indicator benchmark (see Table 6). These findings suggest that our model has moderate-to-strong predictive power.

Table 6. CVPAT – PLS-SEM vs. Indicator average (IA)

	PLS loss	IA loss	Average loss difference	t value	p value
Recommendation	0.567	1.031	-0.464	20.284	0.000
Satisfaction	1.562	3.926	-2.365	22.840	0.000
Overall	1.064	2.479	-1.414	24.038	0.000

4.4 MULTIGROUP ANALYSES

In our multigroup analyses, no significant differences are found between female and male respondents. However, the negative path coefficient between time constraints and WRE is statistically more significant among females than males. The differences in the path coefficients between these groups is notably distinct. Additionally, we assessed whether significant path coefficient differences could be identified based

on different functions within our sample by regrouping respondents into five categories: administrative and technical staff, nursing staff, medical staff, medico-technical staff, and medico-therapeutic staff. Bootstrap multigroup analyses indicate statistically different path coefficients between the perceived usefulness of resources and WRE for administrative and technical staff compared with nursing staff. For nursing staff, the relationship between the perceived usefulness of resources and WRE is positive, whereas for administrative and technical staff, it is negative.

Path coefficients between leadership, communication, and JS differ significantly between nursing staff and medico-therapeutic staff, with the former being more critical. Additionally, the relationship between value congruence and JS is notably stronger among medico-therapeutic staff, despite both groups showing positive and significant correlations. Overall, the sociodemographic variables reveal minimal differences, contributing little to our empirical findings.

5 DISCUSSION

Our empirical results were expected, and all independent variables were correlated with JS. The primary factors influencing JS are value congruence, leadership and communication, work schedule flexibility, and training and promotion. These elements are essential for enhancing JS among hospital staff. These findings corroborate previous research on the positive impacts of organizational value fit (value congruence) in public settings (Holt, 2018; Knies et al., 2022; Steijn & Giauque, 2021). Professional ethos, in which employees can embody important values in their daily activities, has been identified as a significant motivational lever (Kerpershoek et al., 2016). Thus, our study confirms the critical importance of aligning organizational and staff values for JS.

Research has increasingly focused on leadership, revealing its significance in enhancing staff engagement and JS. Leadership is crucial for nurses' resilience (Kihlström et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2024). Our study naturally links work schedule flexibility to JS, especially in hospitals, where schedules are often subject to change. Flexibility helps balance work and personal duties (Buick et al., 2024), which explains the strong negative relationship between time constraints and JS. Work-life balance is crucial for well-being (Edgar et al., 2015), and inflexible job arrangements can harm JS. Training and promotion positively impact JS, signaling organizational care and recognition. These opportunities are often part of "high performance work practices" or "high performance work systems" (Abner et al., 2022; Kaushik & Mukherjee, 2022; Kim et al., 2022).

POS was negatively and significantly related to JS. This variable reflects respondents' experiences of inadequate recognition (beyond financial rewards) and their satisfaction with the quality of support and recognition from hospital management. Our findings indicate that respondents faced a lack of recognition and support from hospital management, which negatively affected JS. This issue is managerial, as perceived organizational support is consistently linked to work engagement and JS (Giauque & Varone, 2019; Kleine et al., 2019; Shantz et al., 2014).

Several factors impact WRE. First, JS is highly correlated with WRE, indicating that JS is crucial (Pitts et al., 2011). Therefore, measures to enhance JS are essential. JS mediates the relationship between independent variables and WRE, further highlighting its significance. Organizational support is also deemed important by the respondents (Hur & Abner, 2024). Perceived organizational care and recognition positively influence WRE, and they are pivotal for employee retention and employer attractiveness. Additionally, value congruence (or 'fit') relates positively to WRE. Previous studies have shown that values influence turnover intention (Campbell & Im, 2015; Kim, 2015; Shim et al., 2015), confirming the necessity of integrating values into policies to boost employer attractiveness and employee retention. Work schedule flexibility, which allows employees to balance their personal and professional obligations, also enhances WRE. This supports the emphasis on flexible work arrangements (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023; Lee et al., 2023) to sustain work-life balance, including in public hospitals. Conversely, time constraints negatively affect staff retention and hospital attractiveness as an employer.

Our findings indicate that leadership and communication have a negative relationship with WRE but a strong positive relationship with JS. This may be due to the importance of supervision and communication quality in organizational governance. Respondents in our study rated the governance and supervision processes in their organizations poorly, negatively affecting their WRE. In Switzerland, hospital

governance relies increasingly on bureaucratic rules and performance indicators (Emery & Giauque, 2019; Giauque, 2024). Consequently, hospital management is perceived as detached from daily job activities, partly because of the elimination of some middle management positions. Thus, hospital governance appears to be disconnected from professional activities, focusing more on political and performance issues, which can adversely affect retention and attractiveness.

This perceived detachment may also alter the way employees interpret leadership and communication practices at the local level, creating tensions between positive supervisor relationships and broader organizational dissatisfaction.

In environments characterized by organizational toxicity, supportive relationships between employees and their immediate supervisors may not be sufficient to mitigate negative perceptions of the broader organization. Research grounded in SET suggests that while supportive supervisor relationships contribute positively to employee attitudes, POS plays a more critical role in shaping organizational commitment and employer attractiveness (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). When employees experience a disconnect between their immediate supervisors' support and the organization's broader culture or practices, feelings of organizational betrayal or disillusionment can arise (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Thus, even strong line manager relationships may, paradoxically, highlight systemic organizational shortcomings, intensifying employees' negative perceptions of the employer. Future research should explore this complex dynamic further, particularly in highly institutionalized public sector contexts.

Furthermore, while our study is based on a single Swiss public university hospital, the challenges it addresses – such as staff shortages, competition from private sector employers, and the pursuit of employer attractiveness – are common across European public healthcare institutions. Moreover, the theoretical mechanisms underlying our study, notably POS, value congruence, and work schedule flexibility, are grounded in SET (Blau, 1964) and are broadly applicable to similar contexts. Nonetheless, we encourage caution when generalizing the findings beyond public healthcare systems, and suggest that future research validate these insights through multisite or cross-country studies.

5.1 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study were communicated directly to the hospital's HR leadership and senior management teams through several formal presentations. These sessions provided an opportunity to translate empirical insights into actionable recommendations for improving staff retention and employer attractiveness. Given that POS emerged as a key predictor of both JS and WRE, we recommended enhancing recognition practices and managerial support, including more frequent personalized feedback, visible acknowledgment of contributions, and clearer communication of institutional priorities.

Our findings also highlighted the critical role of value congruence in predicting both JS and WRE. This suggests that HR and management practices should aim to reinforce alignment between individual and organizational values – through onboarding processes, internal communication, and involvement in decision-making structures that reflect professional and ethical commitments.

Additionally, work schedule flexibility was found to significantly influence both JS and WRE, while time constraints had a strong negative effect. These results indicate the importance of flexible work arrangements, transparent scheduling practices, and workload management policies that support work-life balance – particularly in high-demand hospital settings.

Finally, although leadership and communication were positively associated with JS, they showed a negative relationship with WRE. This suggests a disconnect between supervisory interactions and the broader perception of the hospital governance. We therefore encouraged a review of management structures, including middle management visibility and participation, to improve both internal legitimacy and external employer image.

These recommendations, grounded in empirical findings, have been shared with the organization to support ongoing policy development and staff engagement initiatives.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Our study aimed to evaluate various organizational and managerial factors that influence staff retention and organizational attractiveness in a public hospital. A survey of over 5,000 responses revealed that JS, POS, value congruence, and work schedule flexibility are key factors in employee retention and employer attractiveness. JS emerged as a crucial mediator between the independent variables and WRE. Leadership and communication were identified as positive antecedents of JS but negatively impacted WRE. This highlights the need for managers to balance general governance with their engagement in professional activities. The study confirms previous findings and is strengthened by its large sample size and rigorous methodology, demonstrating moderate-to-strong predictive power in our model.

6.1 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, it utilized a one-time questionnaire, which, being cross-sectional, does not permit causal inferences between the variables studied. Consequently, we only discuss the relationships, correlations, and associations among the variables where the current literature supports such interpretations. Future research could benefit from a longitudinal approach by repeating this questionnaire over time to assess causal relationships.

Second, the study used a self-report survey to collect both predictor and outcome variables, potentially leading to common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To address this concern, a full collinearity assessment was performed, as recommended by Kock (2015), and no evidence of significant common method bias was found.

Third, JS and WRE were assessed using single-item measures. While this approach offers clarity and efficiency in large-scale organizational surveys, it may limit psychometric precision compared to multi-item scales. Nonetheless, prior research supports the validity and reliability of single-item measures for capturing global constructs such as JS and recommendation behaviors (Fisher et al., 2016; Reichheld, 2003; Wanous et al., 1997). Future research could consider complementing single-item measures with multi-item scales to further enhance measurement robustness.

Lastly, while our research model includes several important variables influencing JS and WRE, other factors, such as HR management practices, job characteristics, or more psychologically oriented factors (e.g., personality traits or emotional resilience), could also play significant roles. Although our model explains a substantial portion of the variance in JS and WRE, future research should integrate additional variables to deepen the understanding of the antecedents of JS and WRE in public academic hospitals.

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