

Transformational leadership, organizational justice, and readiness to change: The mediating role of job satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Mergers and acquisitions create uncertainty about leadership, pay, and work procedures, yet it remains unclear whether leadership and fair treatment build employees' readiness to change through job satisfaction or directly. Drawing on social exchange theory and uncertainty management theory, this study examines how transformational leadership and organizational justice relate to job satisfaction and readiness to change, and how job satisfaction mediates this relationship. Using survey data from 165 permanent employees of five private hospitals in Tangerang, Indonesia, that had undergone mergers and acquisitions, the study analyzed relationships using partial least squares structural equation modeling. Transformational leadership was positively related to organizational justice, job satisfaction, and readiness to change, and organizational justice was positively related to job satisfaction and readiness to change. However, job satisfaction was not related to readiness to change and did not mediate the relationships between transformational leadership or organizational justice and readiness. These findings indicate that, during mergers and acquisitions, readiness depends on change-relevant signals of leadership and fairness rather than on satisfaction with the current job, marking a boundary condition for the affective pathway in social exchange theory. Managers should therefore prioritize fair, transparent integration procedures and visible transformational leadership over satisfaction programs alone.

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1. Introduction

Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) have become a common way for organizations to grow, whether to widen their service networks, gain economies of scale, or strengthen their competitive position (Sarala et al., 2019). For employees, however, a merger is rarely a one-off event. It is a long transition in which owners, leaders, reporting lines, pay systems, and work procedures may all change at once, leaving people unsure about their identity at work, their job security, and their future rewards. The success of such a transition therefore rests

largely on employees' readiness for change: those who are ready take an active part in implementing it, whereas those who are not tend to resist or withdraw (Haffar et al., 2023; Meria et al., 2023; Shahid et al., 2024; Zulkarnain et al., 2024).

Hospitals make this question especially pressing. Hospital care is labor-intensive and depends on close cooperation between medical and non-medical staff, so resistance or disengagement during integration can affect continuity of care and patient safety, not only administrative routines. Studies of hospital mergers document these costs for employees. After two tertiary hospitals merged in Romania, staff satisfaction with job security fell from 91% to 53% (Ilea et al., 2024). In a merged Italian health unit, high mental stress and perceived inequity in rewards were among the strongest correlates of low job satisfaction (Isonne et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, the number of private hospitals rose from 838 in 2010 to 1.900 in 2020, largely because hospital groups expanded by acquiring existing hospitals (Rachmawati et al., 2024). This consolidation is especially evident in Tangerang, Indonesia, where 105 of 128 hospitals (82%) are privately owned. Greater Tangerang, a fast-growing buffer region adjacent to Jakarta, is part of this market, and the five private hospitals examined in this study all changed ownership through a merger or acquisition between 2019 and 2024. Preliminary interviews with the heads of human resources of these hospitals in April 2025 showed that the integration had not gone smoothly for employees. Many long-serving employees resigned because they felt the new management culture was incompatible with them, and job satisfaction and motivation declined as workloads increased while compensation remained unchanged. These conditions point to the two issues this study examines: whether employees perceive the integration as fair and well led, and whether declining satisfaction undermines their readiness to support the change.

To explain why employees become ready for such change, this study adopts social exchange theory (SET) as its grand theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano et al., 2016). During an M&A, the existing psychological contract is disrupted, and employees must re-evaluate whether the new organization is a trustworthy exchange partner. Uncertainty management theory adds that, under such uncertainty, people rely heavily on fairness information to decide whether to cooperate with authorities (Lind & Bos, 2002). Transformational leadership and organizational justice are therefore the most salient exchange resources offered by the acquiring organization, and readiness to change is a form of reciprocation (Peng et al., 2021; Kebede & Wang, 2022).

Prior studies show that transformational leadership is related to employees' perceptions of organizational justice (Alamir et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021; Han et al., 2023; Zuo et al., 2024) and to their job satisfaction (Bakotić & Bulog, 2021; Moin et al., 2021; Chi et al., 2023) and that it is associated with lower resistance and greater openness to change (Henricks et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2021; Yeap et al., 2021). Organizational justice is likewise a consistent predictor of job satisfaction (Al-Douri, 2020; Ghaderi et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2023) and of employees' acceptance of change (Rockstuhl et al., 2020; Kebede & Wang, 2022). Several studies have proposed job satisfaction as the mechanism linking these resources to readiness, because satisfied employees are more likely to see change as an opportunity rather than a threat (Chai et al., 2020; Aprileani & Abadi, 2022; Balami, 2022; Muhajir et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2024).

Others, however, report that change-specific mechanisms such as perceived organizational support, trust, and change valence explain readiness better than general job attitudes (Faupeel & Süß, 2019; Kebede & Wang, 2022). This inconsistency leaves an unresolved question: in the uncertain context of an M&A, is readiness built through a general affective evaluation of the current job, or do employees reciprocate leadership and fairness with readiness directly? Given that job satisfaction is retrospective, reflecting the job as it has

been, readiness is inherently prospective, reflecting the organization as it will be (Vakola, 2014). The M&A context provides a strong test of the satisfaction pathway.

Existing studies have examined these constructs mostly in pairs, in non-healthcare settings, and outside M&A situations (Appelbaum et al., 2017; Arnéguy et al., 2020; Meria et al., 2022). Accordingly, this study examines the direct relationships among transformational leadership, organizational justice, job satisfaction, and readiness to change, and the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationships of transformational leadership and organizational justice with readiness to change among employees of merged or acquired private hospitals in Tangerang. Theoretically, it tests whether job satisfaction continues to translate exchange resources into readiness under M&A uncertainty, thereby examining a boundary condition of SET's affective pathway. Practically, it identifies the levers hospital managers can use to build readiness during post-merger integration.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Grand Theory

Social exchange theory (SET) holds that when an organization provides resources that employees value, such as supportive leadership and fair treatment, employees feel obliged to reciprocate with attitudes and behaviors that benefit the organization (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano et al., 2016). Readiness to change is one such form of reciprocation because it expresses willingness to support the organization's new direction (Kebede & Wang, 2022). The theory distinguishes two routes through which employees return exchange resources. In the affective route, favorable treatment first improves employees' evaluation of their job, and this positive affect is then reciprocated (Colquitt et al., 2013). Job satisfaction typically carries this route. In the cognitive route, employees reciprocate directly based on their judgment of whether the exchange partner is trustworthy (Cropanzano et al., 2016). Uncertainty management theory, which grew out of fairness heuristic theory, specifies when the cognitive route should dominate: under high uncertainty, people use fairness information and the conduct of authorities as shortcuts for deciding whether to cooperate (Lind & Bos, 2002). An M&A is precisely such a situation. Together, the two theories form the basis for hypothesis development.

2.1.2. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership refers to a leadership approach in which leaders inspire followers to place collective interests above their own by communicating a compelling vision, serving as role models, encouraging new ways of thinking, and attending to each follower's needs (Bass, 1997). It is measured here as employees' perceptions of their immediate supervisor across idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 2000). In an M&A, supervisors are the primary channel through which employees interpret the integration and the intentions of the new owner (Peng et al., 2021).

2.1.3. Organizational Justice

Organizational justice describes how employees judge the fairness of decisions and the procedures used in their organization (Adamovic, 2023). In accordance with the instrument used by Taamneh et al. (2024), this variable is measured through three main dimensions adapted from Niehoff and Moorman (1993). These three dimensions include distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. These

dimensions are particularly salient in an M&A, which typically involves harmonizing salary structures and revising procedures (Melkonian et al., 2011).

2.1.4. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is the positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job and job experiences (Locke, 1976). It reflects how employees evaluate the various facets of their work, including the work itself, pay, promotion opportunities, supervision, co-workers, and working conditions (Jayaraman et al., 2023). Employees feel satisfied when what the organization provides matches what employees expect and value, so satisfaction reflects not only the job itself but also how employees judge their relationship with the organization (Locke, 1976). In this study, job satisfaction is treated as a global and facet-based evaluation of employees' current job. It is retrospective, reflecting accumulated job experiences, which may or may not relate to how employees anticipate the post-merger organization (Vakola, 2014).

2.1.5. Readiness to Change

Readiness to change is the extent to which employees are cognitively and emotionally prepared to accept, support, and actively participate in a particular organizational change (Meria et al., 2023). It comprises four dimensions: appropriateness (the belief that the change is right for the organization), management support (the belief that leaders are committed to the change), change efficacy (confidence in one's ability to implement it), and personal valence (the belief that the change will be personally beneficial) (Holt et al., 2007). Unlike job satisfaction, readiness is prospective and change-specific: it concerns the organization as it will be rather than the job as it has been. Readiness also shapes how change initiatives translate into employee performance (Laseinde et al., 2019).

2.2. Hypothesis Development

2.2.1. Transformational Leadership and Organizational Justice

The causal logic of this relationship runs from leader behavior, through employees' interpretation of that behavior, to their fairness judgment. Supervisors are the most visible agents of the organization, so employees infer how fairly the organization treats them largely from how their leaders act (Cropanzano et al., 2016). Each transformational behavior supplies a specific fairness cue. Idealized influence signals integrity and consistency, which are core rules of procedural justice; individualized consideration communicates respect and dignity, the essence of interactional justice; and inspirational motivation provides explanations for decisions, which strengthens informational fairness (Kim et al., 2021). Transformational leadership should be associated with higher perceived justice, as these cues accumulate into a general belief that decisions are made consistently, transparently, and respectfully (Alamir et al., 2019; Han et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2023; Zuo et al., 2024). Fairness heuristic theory implies that this link is strongest when formal information is scarce (Lind & Bos, 2002). During an M&A, pay and procedures are still being harmonized, so employees rely even more on their supervisor's conduct as a heuristic for whether the new organization will be fair. **H₁: Transformational Leadership is Positively Related to Organizational Justice.**

2.2.2. Transformational Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Under SET, job satisfaction reflects how favorably employees evaluate the resources received in the exchange (Cropanzano et al., 2016). Transformational

leaders provide several such resources. Individualized consideration signals that employees are valued and supports their development; intellectual stimulation makes work more challenging and meaningful; and inspirational motivation connects daily tasks to a larger purpose (Moin et al., 2021; Chi et al., 2023). These resources satisfy employees' needs for recognition, growth, and meaning, and fulfilling these needs directly contributes to positive job appraisal (Khan et al., 2020; Putri & Meria, 2022). In an M&A, when established routines and relationships are disrupted, the immediate supervisor becomes one of the few stable sources of these resources, so supervisors' transformational behavior should be especially consequential for how employees evaluate their jobs (Peng et al., 2021). **H₂: Transformational Leadership is Positively Related to Job Satisfaction.**

2.2.3. Organizational Justice and Job Satisfaction

SET and equity reasoning suggest that employees compare personal contributions with received benefits and with the outcomes of others (Colquitt et al., 2013). When outcomes are distributed fairly, the exchange is viewed as balanced; when procedures are consistent, future outcomes are anticipated; and when treated with dignity, employees feel valued as members of the organization (Lupsa et al., 2020). Each of these perceptions removes a source of dissatisfaction and adds a source of positive appraisal, which is why justice is repeatedly identified as one of the most robust antecedents of job satisfaction (Al-Douri, 2020; Bakotić & Bulog, 2021; Ghaderi et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2023). Studies of merged health organizations confirm that perceived inequity in rewards is among the strongest correlates of low satisfaction after a merger (Isonne et al., 2021). Fairness becomes a central concern after an M&A as salary harmonization, workload redistribution, and new procedures take place (Melkonian et al., 2011) Justice should be positively associated with employees' job evaluations. **H₃: Organizational Justice is Positively Related to Job Satisfaction.**

2.2.4. Organizational Justice and Readiness to Change

Uncertainty management theory explains why justice should relate directly to readiness. Change creates uncertainty about whether one's interests will be protected, and fairness information reduces this uncertainty by indicating that authorities can be trusted not to exploit employees (Lind & Bos, 2002). Employees who perceive the integration as fair therefore expect their interests to be considered, appraise the change as less threatening, and become more willing to support it (Cui & Jiao, 2019; Rehman et al., 2021). In SET terms, fair treatment also builds the trust that obliges employees to reciprocate with cooperative attitudes towards the organization's change agenda (Cropanzano et al., 2016). Fair procedures further buffer the negative consequences of intensive change on commitment to change (Lee et al., 2017), and justice has been positively related to readiness for change (Arnéguy et al., 2020; Rockstuhl et al., 2020; Kebede & Wang, 2022) and to cooperation in post-merger integration (Melkonian et al., 2011). **H₄: Organizational Justice is Positively Related to Readiness to Change.**

2.2.5. Transformational Leadership and Readiness to Change

Transformational leadership should relate to readiness because its behaviors align with the beliefs that shape readiness. By communicating why the change is necessary and where the organization is heading, leaders strengthen employees' belief that the change is appropriate; by expressing confidence and acting as role models, such leadership reinforces change efficacy and the perception of management support;

and by attending to individual concerns, these actions increase personal valence (Faupel & Süß, 2019). In exchange terms, employees who receive such support reciprocate by endorsing the leader's change agenda (Waisy & Wei, 2020; Peng et al., 2021). A meta-analysis confirms that transformational leadership is positively associated with employees' reactions to organizational change (Peng et al., 2021), and similar results have been reported for readiness (Henricks et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2021; Yeap et al., 2021; Putri & Meria, 2022). Supervisors' transformational behavior should be directly associated with readiness, as these leaders serve as the main interpreters of an M&A. **H₅: Transformational Leadership is Positively Related to Readiness to Change.**

2.2.6. Job Satisfaction and Readiness to Change

The affect-based extension of SET proposes that positive job evaluations create a reservoir of goodwill and psychological resources that employees draw on when the organization asks for something new (Colquitt et al., 2013). Satisfied employees feel valued and secure in their exchange relationship; consequently, these individuals are more likely to interpret a change as an opportunity rather than a threat and to invest effort in it (Chai et al., 2020; Gupta et al., 2024). By contrast, dissatisfied employees may see change as a further loss and respond with resistance (Yang et al., 2024). Accordingly, job satisfaction has been identified as a catalyst for readiness for transformational change (Lubis et al., 2022), and empirical studies report positive relationships between the two constructs (Balami, 2022; Milovanovic et al., 2022). **H₆: Job Satisfaction is Positively Related to Readiness to Change.**

2.2.7. The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction between Transformational Leadership and Readiness to Change

The seventh hypothesis combines the first stage of the second hypothesis with the second stage of the sixth hypothesis into a sequential exchange. In the first stage, transformational leaders provide socio-emotional resources such as recognition, development, and meaning, which raise employees' job satisfaction (Moin et al., 2021; Chi et al., 2023). In the second stage, this positive evaluation creates a felt obligation and a sense of security that are reciprocated as readiness to support the organization's change (Lubis et al., 2022). Job satisfaction is thus the affective carrier that explains why leadership behavior is returned as readiness: employees do not reciprocate the leader's behavior as such, but the improved quality of their working life that the behavior produces (Cropanzano et al., 2016). If this affective route holds, part of the association between transformational leadership and readiness should run through job satisfaction, as reported in banking and medical faculties (Aprileani & Abadi, 2022; Muhajir et al., 2022). **H₇: Job Satisfaction Positively Mediates the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Readiness to Change.**

2.3.8. The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction between Organizational Justice and Readiness to Change

The eighth hypothesis applies the same sequential logic to justice. In the first stage, fair outcomes, procedures, and treatment signal a balanced exchange and raise job satisfaction. In the second stage, satisfied employees, feeling that the organization has kept its side of the bargain, reciprocate by supporting the change. The affect-based perspective on justice argues that fairness elicits positive job attitudes that, in turn, drive cooperative responses (Colquitt et al., 2013), and job satisfaction has been found to mediate the relationships between justice and several work outcomes (Gori et al.,

2020). Arnéguy et al. (2020) call for research on affective mechanisms linking justice to readiness. If fair integration decisions increase employees' satisfaction, and that satisfaction increases their willingness to support integration, job satisfaction should account for part of the association between justice and readiness. **H₈: Job Satisfaction Positively Mediates the Relationship Between Organizational Justice and Readiness to Change.**

Figure 1 summarizes the research model. Transformational leadership is positioned as the initial exchange resource that shapes employees' perceptions of organizational justice, job satisfaction, and readiness to change. Organizational justice, in turn, is proposed to relate to job satisfaction and readiness to change. Job satisfaction is central in the model as the affective mechanism linking both exchange resources to readiness to change; the dashed lines represent the two hypothesized indirect relationships. The model therefore allows a direct comparison between the affective route through job satisfaction and the direct, fairness- and leadership-based routes to readiness during an M&A.

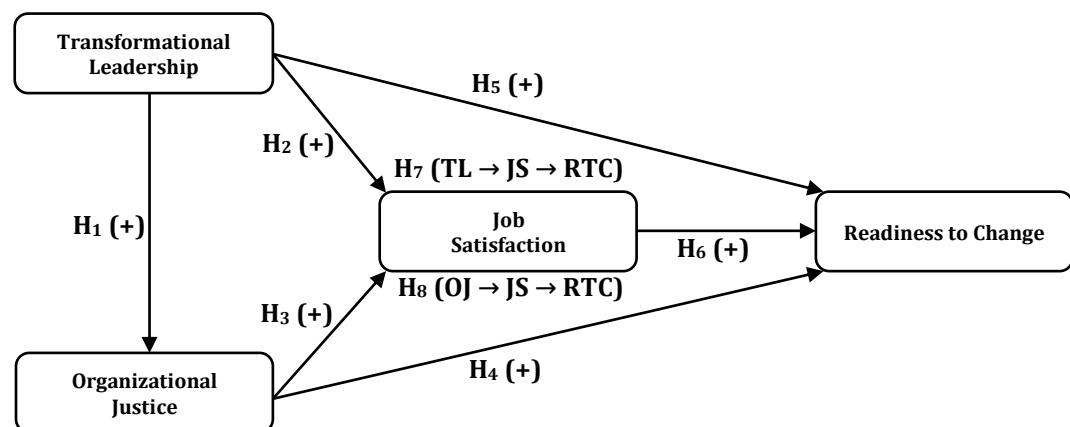


Figure 1. Research Model

3. Research Methods

3.1. Population and Sampling Method

The study was conducted at five private hospitals in Greater Tangerang that changed ownership through a merger or acquisition between 2019 and 2024 and granted permission to participate. The target population comprised permanent employees of the five hospitals who had worked there before the merger or acquisition and had directly experienced the resulting changes. The exact size of this population could not be determined and is therefore treated as unknown, as the hospitals' personnel records do not distinguish employees who joined before and after the transaction.

Accordingly, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was used, and sample adequacy was established through statistical power analysis rather than a population-based formula (Faul et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2022). Respondents were selected based on three criteria: permanent employment status; employment at the hospital for at least one year before the merger or acquisition, to enable a comparison of pre- and post-merger conditions; and direct experience of changes in management, structure, or policies resulting from the transaction. A total of 13 questionnaires out of the 178 returned were excluded because respondents were contract employees, had joined after the transaction, or provided incomplete answers, leaving 165 valid responses (92.7%). An a priori power analysis in G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) for the most complex regression (three predictors

of readiness), assuming a medium effect ($f^2 = 0.15$) and $\alpha = 0.05$, required 77 respondents for a power of 0.80 and 119 for 0.95; the sample also exceeded the ten-times rule (Hair et al., 2022). The study followed standard ethical procedures: the institutional research ethics committee approved the protocol, each hospital granted permission, respondents gave informed consent and could withdraw at any time, and no identifying information was collected. To reduce common method bias, anonymity was assured, and predictor and outcome items were placed in separate sections (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

3.2. Data Collection Method

All constructs were measured with validated multi-item scales on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Transformational leadership (TL) was measured with seven items adapted from Bass and Avolio (2000) and Sudibjo and Prameswari (2021); organizational justice (OJ) with twelve items covering distributive, procedural, and interactional justice from Taamneh et al. (2024); job satisfaction (JS) with seven items covering the work itself, pay, promotion, supervision, co-workers, working conditions, and the job overall Jayaraman et al. (2023); and readiness to change (RTC) with twelve items reflecting appropriateness, management support, change efficacy, and personal valence Holt et al. (2007) and Meria et al. (2023).

3.3. Data Analysis Method

The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4, which suits prediction-oriented models with mediating paths (Hair et al., 2019). The measurement model was evaluated using outer loadings (> 0.70), Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability (> 0.70), average variance extracted (AVE > 0.5), and the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT < 0.90) (Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2019). The structural model was evaluated using inner VIF (< 5), R^2 (0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 for substantial, moderate, and weak (Chin, 1998), f^2 (0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 for small, medium, and large), Q^2 (> 0), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR < 0.08) (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Henseler et al., 2016). Hypotheses were tested by bootstrapping with 5.000 subsamples and two-tailed tests; a hypothesis was supported when $t > 1.96$ and $p < 0.05$ (Hair et al., 2022). Mediation was assessed through the specific indirect effects, and its type was determined from the significance of the direct effect (Nitzl et al., 2016).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Respondent Profile

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	118	71.5
	Male	47	28.5
Age	20–29 years	37	22.4
	30–39 years	80	48.5
	40–49 years	41	24.8
	≥ 50 years	7	4.3
	Medical	93	56.4
Position	Non-Medical	72	43.6
Length of Service	1–2 years	24	14.5
	3–4 years	27	16.4
	5–6 years	16	9.7
	> 6 years	98	59.4
Hospital	Hospital A	25	15.1
	Hospital B	21	12.7
	Hospital C	42	25.5
	Hospital D	33	20.0
	Hospital E	44	26.7

According to Table 1, most respondents were female (71.5%), aged 30–39 years (48.5%), had worked at the hospital for more than six years (59.4%), and held medical positions (56.4%). The sample was thus dominated by experienced employees who had worked under both the pre- and post-merger management.

4.2. Measurement Model

Table 2. Outer Loadings, VIF, Reliability, and Convergent Validity

Variable	Outer Loading	VIF	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Transformational Leadership			0.958	0.965	0.798
TL1	0.879	3.945			
TL2	0.876	3.683			
TL3	0.908	4.684			
TL4	0.914	4.842			
TL5	0.882	3.540			
TL6	0.938	7.490			
TL7	0.852	3.405			
Organizational Justice			0.946	0.954	0.675
OJ1	0.765	4.106			
OJ2	0.806	6.342			
OJ3	0.857	3.375			
OJ4	0.859	5.246			
OJ5	0.775	2.300			
OJ7	0.778	2.382			
OJ9	0.844	3.191			
OJ10	0.852	3.203			
OJ11	0.854	3.328			
OJ12	0.816	3.077			
Job Satisfaction			0.922	0.940	0.724
JS1	0.874	3.756			
JS2	0.899	4.206			
JS3	0.862	3.419			
JS4	0.723	1.726			
JS5	0.825	2.472			
JS7	0.909	4.090			
Readiness to Change			0.944	0.952	0.666
RTC1	0.869	3.901			
RTC2	0.869	4.297			
RTC3	0.836	3.058			
RTC4	0.878	4.469			
RTC5	0.817	3.324			
RTC6	0.853	3.972			
RTC7	0.794	2.759			
RTC8	0.750	2.206			
RTC11	0.726	2.308			
RTC12	0.754	2.128			

The initial model contained 38 items. Five items with loadings below 0.70 were removed (JS6 = 0.673; OJ6 = 0.581; OJ8 = 0.447; RTC9 = 0.609; RTC10 = 0.689). The two deleted justice items came from the procedural dimension, which remains represented by OJ5 and OJ7, and the deleted readiness items came from the change efficacy and personal valence dimensions, each still represented by at least two items, so every theoretical dimension remained represented. As shown in Table 2 and Figure 2, the 33 retained items had loadings between 0.723 and 0.938. Cronbach's alpha (0.922–0.958) and composite

reliability (0.940–0.965) exceeded 0.70, and AVE values (0.666–0.798) exceeded 0.50, confirming reliability and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Most indicator VIF values were below 5; the higher values for TL6, OJ2, and OJ4 reflect the strong inter-item correlations expected among reflective indicators of the same construct, for which collinearity thresholds are not an evaluation criterion (Hair et al., 2022). All HTMT ratios (0.799–0.864) were below 0.90, confirming discriminant validity (Table 3) (Henseler et al., 2015).

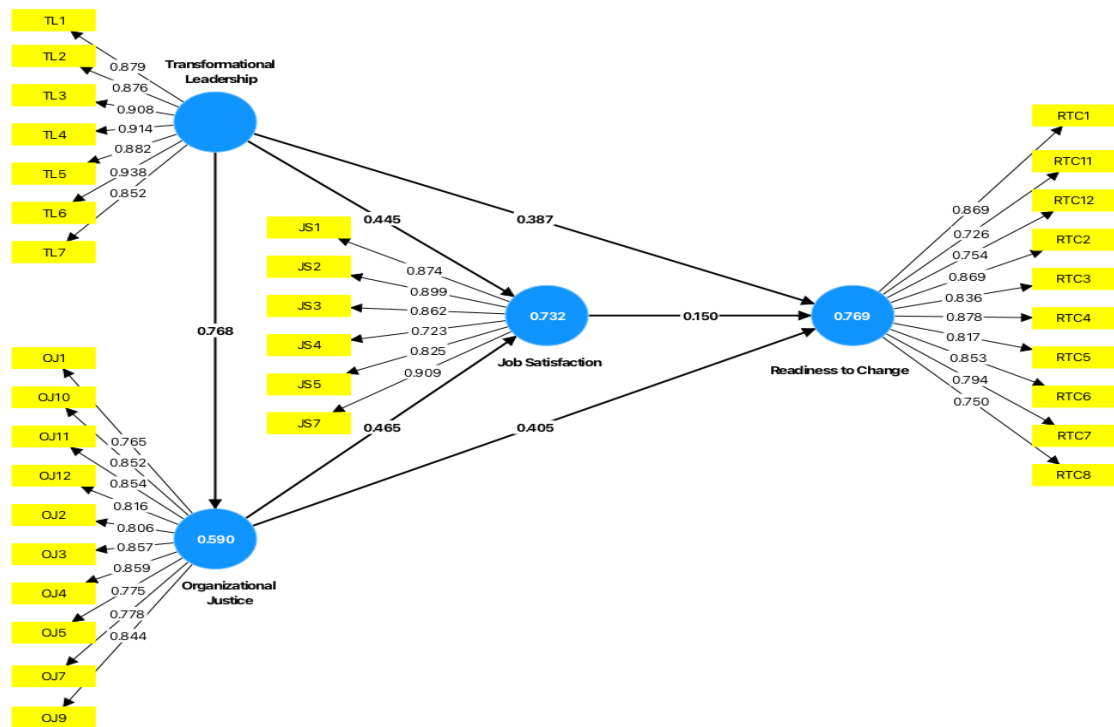


Figure 2. PLS Algorithm Output

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Construct	JS	OJ	RTC	TL
Job Satisfaction				
Organizational Justice	0.854			
Readiness to Change	0.836	0.864		
Transformational Leadership	0.846	0.799	0.858	

4.3. Structural Model

All inner VIF values (1.000–3.724) were below 5, so collinearity among predictors does not bias the path estimates (Hair et al., 2022); the highest value, for job satisfaction as a predictor of readiness, shows that job satisfaction shares considerable variance with the other two predictors, which is relevant to H6. Transformational leadership explained 59.0% of the variance in organizational justice, transformational leadership and organizational justice explained 73.2% of the variance in job satisfaction, and the three predictors explained 76.9% of the variance in readiness to change, indicating moderate-to-substantial explanatory power (Table 4). All Q^2 values were above zero, indicating predictive relevance. The SRMR (0.068) was below 0.08 (Henseler et al., 2016). The normed fit index (NFI) (0.769) was below the conventional 0.90 benchmark (Bentler & Bonett, 1980) because fit indices derived from covariance-based PLS-SEM are of limited

use (Hair et al., 2022). The model is evaluated primarily on the SRMR and its explanatory and predictive power, and the NFI is acknowledged as a limitation.

Table 4. Structural Model Assessment

Path / Construct	Inner VIF	f ²	Effect size	R ²	Adj. R ²	Q ²
Transformational Leadership → Organizational Justice	1.000	1.440	Large			
Transformational Leadership → Job Satisfaction	2.440	0.302	Medium			
Organizational Justice → Job Satisfaction	2.440	0.330	Medium			
Transformational Leadership → Readiness to Change	3.176	0.204	Medium			
Organizational Justice → Readiness to Change	3.245	0.219	Medium			
Job Satisfaction → Readiness to Change	3.724	0.026	Small			
Organizational Justice				0.590	0.588	0.385
Job Satisfaction				0.732	0.728	0.514
Readiness to Change				0.769	0.764	0.495

4.4. Hypothesis Test

Table 5 reports the bootstrapping results for the direct and specific indirect relationships. Transformational leadership was positively related to organizational justice, job satisfaction, and readiness to change, supporting the first, second, and fifth hypotheses. Organizational justice was positively related to job satisfaction and readiness to change, supporting the third and fourth hypotheses. The path from job satisfaction to readiness was positive but not significant, so the sixth hypothesis was not supported. Neither the indirect relationship through job satisfaction for transformational leadership nor for organizational justice was significant; therefore, the seventh and eighth hypotheses were not supported. The pattern corresponds to direct-only non-mediation, as both direct relationships were significant while the indirect relationships were not.

Table 5. Result of Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Transformational Leadership → Organizational Justice	0.768	0.042	18.446	0.000
Transformational Leadership → Job Satisfaction	0.445	0.076	5.860	0.000
Organizational Justice → Job Satisfaction	0.465	0.073	6.359	0.000
Organizational Justice → Readiness to Change	0.405	0.106	3.841	0.000
Transformational Leadership → Readiness to Change	0.387	0.122	3.173	0.002
Job Satisfaction → Readiness to Change	0.150	0.095	1.571	0.116
Transformational Leadership → Job Satisfaction → Readiness to Change	0.067	0.050	1.341	0.180
Organizational Justice → Job Satisfaction → Readiness to Change	0.070	0.042	1.648	0.099

4.5. Discussion

4.5.1. Transformational Leadership and Organizational Justice

From a SET perspective, employees in merged hospitals evaluate the organization not in the abstract but through the supervisors who represent it (Cropanzano et al., 2016). After an M&A, policies on pay, workload, and procedures are still being aligned, so employees have little concrete information on whether the new owner will treat them fairly; in such situations, people rely on the cue closest at hand, which for most hospital staff is their own supervisor (Lind & Bos, 2002). The strongest leadership indicator, giving staff opportunities to work together, fits this explanation: supervisors who involve their staff and explain decisions earn trust, and this trust extends to judgments about procedures and rewards, not only interpersonal treatment (Kim et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2023). This is consistent with evidence from universities and public organizations (Alamir et al., 2019; Zuo et al., 2024).

4.5.2. Transformational Leadership and Job Satisfaction

SET offers a straightforward explanation. Leaders of this kind give employees valued inducements, such as recognition, support for development, personal attention, and a sense of where the organization is heading, and employees respond by feeling better about their work (Peng et al., 2021). Putri and Meria (2022) describe a similar process: by inspiring, challenging, and paying attention to individual staff, these leaders help employees see the purpose of their work, fostering a sense of value and room to grow. In this sense, job satisfaction is about more than pay and working conditions. Feeling appreciated, understanding one's role, and getting along with colleagues also matter.

Among the leadership items, the strongest loading was the supervisor giving staff opportunities to work together; among the satisfaction items, it was simply being satisfied and happy with one's current job. Hospital staff, both medical and non-medical, carry heavy workloads and rely heavily on their unit heads. When unit heads encourage teamwork and explain where the hospital is going, employees seem able to stay satisfied even as the merger changes many familiar routines. These results are in line with earlier studies (Bakotić & Bulog, 2021; Moin et al., 2021; Chi et al., 2023). In addition, during post-merger integration, the direct supervisor remains one of the few stable sources of employee satisfaction.

4.5.3. Organizational Justice and Job Satisfaction

This aligns with the SET view that employees appraise their jobs more favorably when employees perceive a balanced exchange (Colquitt et al., 2013). The item-level data reveal a less obvious pattern: salary fairness relative to co-workers was among the strongest justice indicators, yet the distributive items on schedules, workload, and salary were weaker. Pay thus matters most when employees judge fairness and feel most short-changed. This is typical of mergers, in which staff from different legacy hospitals compare salaries and workloads, and pay harmonization leaves some groups feeling disadvantaged (Melkonian et al., 2011; Isonne et al., 2021). This supports earlier findings linking justice to satisfaction (Al-Douri, 2020; Bakotić & Bulog, 2021; Ghaderi et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2023) and implies that how pay is harmonized, and how openly the process is explained, is closely tied to how employees feel about their jobs.

4.5.4. Organizational Justice and Readiness to Change

Uncertainty management theory offers a plausible reason. In a merger, employees do not yet know how the new management will treat them, and visible signs of fair decision-making make the change seem less risky (Lind & Bos, 2002). The item-level data align with this. Salary fairness relative to co-workers was the strongest justice item, and the belief that the change suits the hospital's priorities was among the strongest readiness items, suggesting that staff who regard the outcomes of the integration as fair also tend to accept the change itself as appropriate.

From a SET perspective, employees who feel fairly treated, respected, and involved expect the new organization to keep its side of the bargain, supporting the integration out of willingness rather than obligation (Arnéguy et al., 2020; Rockstuhl et al., 2020; Kebede & Wang, 2022). Fair procedures may be particularly important when change is extensive, as in a merger, as such practices can ease anxiety and resistance (Lee et al., 2017). Earlier post-merger studies found that perceived justice goes together with employees' willingness to cooperate (Melkonian et al., 2011). Moreover, our findings suggest that the same pattern applies to readiness to change among hospital employees in an emerging economy.

4.5.5. Transformational Leadership and Readiness to Change

Supervisors who explain why the merger is needed, express confidence it will succeed, and support individual employees appear to strengthen employees' beliefs that the change is appropriate, management-supported, and manageable, three core dimensions of readiness. The item-level results support this interpretation: the most representative leadership indicator was that supervisors gave employees opportunities to work together, and employees perceived the change as consistent with the hospital's priorities. Open and communicative leaders who support their subordinates' development thus seem to build trust and a work climate that is flexible and responsive to change, helping employees adjust their work to the new organization (Meria et al., 2022).

In SET, transformational leaders attend to employees' personal needs while emphasizing the goals of the organization as a whole, and employees reciprocate this support by committing to the leader's change agenda (Peng et al., 2021). This finding is consistent with evidence that transformational leadership is associated with openness and readiness to change (Henricks et al., 2020; Waisy & Wei, 2020; Islam et al., 2021; Yeap et al., 2021). It extends that evidence to post-merger hospitals, where the direct supervisor is the main interpreter of an integration whose outcomes remain uncertain for employees.

4.5.6. Job Satisfaction and Readiness to Change

Employees who are satisfied with their jobs are not necessarily ready to accept the changes that follow a merger. Four lines of reasoning explain this result. First, the two constructs differ in temporal orientation. Job satisfaction is a retrospective evaluation of the job as it has been, whereas readiness to change is a prospective belief that a specific change is needed and can succeed (Vakola, 2014). In an M&A, the job employees value is precisely what the integration may alter, so satisfaction with the status quo can coexist with uncertainty about, or even reluctance toward, the future organization (Vakola, 2014). Second, uncertainty management theory suggests that, under high uncertainty, employees decide whether to support authorities based on fairness information rather than their general affective state (Lind & Bos, 2002). Consistently, organizational justice and transformational leadership, which are cues

about how the change will be managed, showed medium effects on readiness, whereas job satisfaction added little unique explanatory power.

Third, the statistical results point in the same direction. Job satisfaction and readiness to change were strongly correlated, but satisfaction also overlapped heavily with transformational leadership and organizational justice. Once leadership and justice were in the model, satisfaction explained little beyond what these variables already accounted for. This raises the possibility that the positive link reported in earlier studies partly reflects what satisfaction and readiness have in common, perceived justice in particular, rather than a direct contribution of satisfaction itself (Balami, 2022; Yang et al., 2024). Adamovic (2023) makes a related point, noting that dissatisfaction at work often stems from perceived unfairness, for instance in appraisals or promotion decisions. Fourth, the item-level data highlight the social side of the merger. Among all satisfaction facets, respondents were least satisfied with their co-workers, and the item about change disrupting personal relationships did not load well on readiness.

This suggests that when units from different legacy hospitals combine, concerns about losing established working relationships may hold employees back even when reasonably satisfied with their jobs. Staff may worry about losing built relationships, along with the sense of security those relationships provide. That worry can hold them back even when their working conditions are, on the whole, acceptable. Being satisfied with one's tasks or working conditions is probably not enough to carry employees through a change that unsettles their social world at work. Finally, interpret the non-significant result as evidence of a weak unique effect rather than no effect. Overall, the finding is consistent with studies showing that job satisfaction is a weaker predictor of change attitudes than change-specific variables (Arnéguy et al., 2020). It contrasts with studies that reported a significant direct effect in more stable organizational contexts (Lubis et al., 2022; Gupta et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2024), where the job that employees value is not itself being restructured.

4.5.7. The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction between Transformational Leadership and Readiness to Change

Job satisfaction did not mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and readiness, whereas the direct relationship remained significant, a pattern of direct-only non-mediation. Leaders therefore build readiness not by making employees feel better about their current jobs but by shaping how employees interpret the change itself, explaining its rationale, demonstrating management commitment, and strengthening confidence that it can be implemented (Faupel & Süß, 2019). This is consistent with evidence that transformational leadership influences change responses mainly through change-specific mechanisms such as trust in leadership and affective commitment to change (Cao & Le, 2022). It also suggests that the mediating role of satisfaction reported in banking and medical faculties (Aprileani & Abadi, 2022; Muhajir et al., 2022) may not generalize to post-merger settings.

4.5.8. The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction between Organizational Justice and Readiness to Change

Job satisfaction also did not mediate the relationship between organizational justice and readiness, while the direct relationship remained significant, again indicating direct-only non-mediation. Fair treatment did raise satisfaction (H3). However, employees appear to reciprocate fairness with readiness directly, through expectations about how the integration will be managed, rather than through a general

appraisal of their current job. This pattern supports the cognitive route specified by uncertainty management theory (Lind & Bos, 2002) over the affect-based route of SET (Colquitt et al., 2013), and it answers the call of Arnéguy et al. (2020) by showing that, in a merger, the affective mechanism linking justice to readiness is weak. More change-specific mediators, such as perceived organizational support (Rockstuhl et al., 2020; Kebede & Wang, 2022) and work engagement (Chai et al., 2020; Zulkarnain et al., 2024), are plausible alternatives for future research.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that, in private hospitals undergoing M&A, transformational leadership and organizational justice are directly and positively related to employees' readiness to change. In contrast, job satisfaction neither predicts readiness nor mediates these relationships. Transformational leadership is also strongly related to perceived justice, and both are related to job satisfaction. During hospital consolidation, employees' readiness thus depends on how employees are led and how fairly the integration is managed, rather than on their current job satisfaction.

These findings refine SET as an explanation of change readiness. Under M&A uncertainty, employees reciprocate fair and inspiring treatment with readiness directly, rather than through a general affective evaluation of their job, so the M&A context constitutes a boundary condition for the theory's affect-based pathway. By showing that both justice and leadership relate directly to readiness, the study also brings uncertainty management reasoning into leadership research on change. It demonstrates empirically that retrospective job attitudes and prospective change attitudes should not be treated as interchangeable.

For hospital managers, the results suggest making remuneration harmonization transparent by publishing grading and salary-mapping criteria before integration and explaining how each employee group is placed. Announce changes to procedures, credentialing, and performance appraisal through a single official channel with a clear rationale, and provide a formal channel for objections with a fixed response time. Train unit heads to communicate change using transformational leadership behaviors, and provide regular briefings during the first months after the transaction. Satisfaction surveys and welfare programs should complement, not replace, fairness and leadership-based interventions, as job satisfaction was not related to readiness.

This study has several limitations. The cross-sectional, self-reported data do not permit causal conclusions, and despite procedural safeguards, common method variance cannot be fully ruled out. The sample was drawn by purposive sampling from a population of unknown size in five private hospitals in one region, so the findings cannot be statistically generalized to all hospital employees; its size limited the detection of small effects such as the path from job satisfaction to readiness, and the normed fit index was below the usual benchmark. Future studies could use longitudinal designs across several regions, compare hospital types or job categories, examine change-specific mediators such as trust in management, perceived organizational support, and change valence, and combine surveys with interviews to show how employees make sense of fairness during integration.

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