




Transformational leadership influences on organisational justice and employee commitment in a customer service organisation



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Orientation: Organisations are facing several challenges pertaining to effective leadership, fairness and loyalty of employees. The moderating influence of transformational leadership (TL) on the relationship between justice and employee commitment is still largely unknown and needs to be explored further, especially within the customer service industry.

Research purpose: The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between organisational justice and employee commitment and to examine the moderating effect of TL on the relationship between organisational justice and employee commitment in a customer service organisation.

Motivation for the study: The research setting of this study is a customer service organisation. This organisation calls for a role model leadership approach, such as TL, to create a just, fair workplace and ultimately increase the level of employee commitment.

Research approach/design and method: A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was used to collect the data from a sample of 111 permanently employed staff in a South African customer service organisation.

Main findings: The findings indicate that TL had a significant positive relationship with organisational justice and employee commitment. Furthermore, the results indicate that TL moderated the relationship between organisational justice and employee commitment.

Practical/managerial implications: The findings showed that TL could be vital as an effective leadership approach that can enhance justice perceptions and psychological attachment in the workplace.

Contribution/value-add: This study contributes to the theoretical debate on TL, workplace fairness and psychological attachment by providing empirical support on the effect of TL on the relationship between justice and commitment perceptions.

Keywords: customer service; employee commitment; moderating effect; organisational justice; transactional leadership; transformational leadership.

Introduction

Employee loyalty is a key proximal precursor for organisationally relevant outcomes such as extra-role behaviours, absenteeism and organisational effectiveness in the customer service industry (Horn, 2019; Mesu, Sanders, & Van Riemsdijk, 2015; Odoardi, Battistelli, Montani, & Peiró, 2019). The customer service industry in South Africa, and to some extent in the rest of Africa, is characterised by a lack of appropriate training, recognition and reward (Govender, 2019; Manda & Ben Dhaou, 2019; Tlapana, 2017). Additional challenges include skill shortages (Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017), as well as talent retention issues and performance problems (Alkhadher & Gadelrab, 2016). These conditions and challenges could make it difficult to sustain fairness and high levels of commitment amongst workers. Several authors suggest that it is imperative for customer service industries to strive for fairness and maintain a high level of commitment and competitiveness sustainability (Coetzer et al., 2017; Gavaza, Viljoen, & Cilliers, 2019; Mujinga, 2020; Scheepers & Reddy, 2019; Thummalapalli, 2019).

Commitment generally is defined as an individual's involvement and identification with the organisation's goals and values (Mujinga, 2020). Committed workers are likely to demonstrate a high level of psychological attachment to the organisation (Mitonga-Monga, 2018b, 2018c). Commitment is therefore associated with high levels of organisational performance (Tebele, 2012), a decrease in absenteeism and turnover intention (Scheepers & Reddy, 2019). Furthermore, a committed employee is likely to go the extra mile beyond the call of duty and tends to stay for a long time with the employing organisation (Kibozi & Michael, 2018). Organisational justice (OJ), on the other hand, refers to the perception of fairness by organisational members in terms of the processes, procedures and reward mechanisms in an organisation (Greenberg & Baron, 2003; Ledimo, 2015a, 2015b; Mitonga-Monga, 2018a, 2018b). A fair workplace was found to be related with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Mitonga-Monga, 2018b, 2018c), employee commitment (Waribo, Akintayo, & Imonophi, 2019a) and decreased turnover intention (Ndlovu, Ngirande, Setati, & Zhuwao, 2018).

Leadership plays a vital role in influencing employee attitudes and behaviour (Al-Yami, Galdas, & Watson, 2018) because leaders can create a conducive atmosphere and influence the psychological attachment of the employee. Transformational leadership (TL) may be an effective leadership approach to encourage and create a fair and just work environment and increase workers' level of commitment in the customer service industry. Transformational leadership is a comprehensive leadership theory according to which the leader demonstrates a high level of moral maturity, motivates and generates higher levels of moral reasoning in followers (Atan & Mahmood, 2019). There seems to be a good theoretical alignment between TL and path-goal theory. For example, TL is characterised by the ability to build loyalty, create vision and stimulate innovation (Ogbu Edeh & Ugwu, 2019). These characteristics align well with leadership and path-goal theory in reflecting various boundary conditions between leadership behaviour and employee outcomes (Cho, Shin, Billing, & Bhagat, 2019). The primary focus of transformational leaders is to transform followers, encourage them to be interested in the organisation rather than their own interest, boost their morale and promote value alignment between followers and the organisation (Cho et al., 2019; Nxumalo, 2020; Scheepers & Storm, 2019). This could make transformational leaders more aware of the importance of task outcomes, transcending their own interest, particularly during these coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) times (Titus & Hoole, 2021), for the sake of the organisation and increasing the levels of fairness and commitment perceptions in the customer service industry. Several online news publications have reported on how the COVID-19 virus is threatening the existence of car rental companies worldwide (Cokayne, 2020a, 2020b). This has resulted in an increase in market share competitiveness of an already declining industry and, to the detriment of the employee, organisations instituting cost-cutting and retrenchment or furloughing

measures on a large scale to survive the pandemic (De Prez, 2020; Mashego, 2020; West, 2020).

However, limited research is available on the effect of TL on the relationship between OJ and employee commitment. To our knowledge, the moderating effect of TL on the association between OJ and employee commitment is still largely unknown.

Research purpose and objectives

The general aim of this study was to examine the moderating effect of TL on the relationship between OJ and employee commitment in a customer service organisation. The specific objectives were to explore the relationship between: (1) OJ and (2) employee commitment; as well as (3) the moderating effect of TL on the association between OJ and employee commitment in a car rental customer service organisation. The value of this study lies in its contribution to the theoretical debate on TL, workplace fairness and psychological attachment by providing empirical support on the effect of TL on the relationship between justice and commitment perceptions. The study also provides suggestions on how OJ could be used as a strategic driver to enhance employee commitment during turbulent and uncertain times.

Literature review

In the next section, the variables of the study and their associated relationships are discussed.

Employee commitment

The construct of employee commitment has attracted the interest of scholars and practitioners over the last few decades (Khuwaja, Ahmed, Abid, & Adeel, 2020; Lo, Ramayah, Min, & Songan, 2010; Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers, 2015). Employee commitment is perceived as an individual's psychological attachment to the organisation (Mitonga-Monga, 2018b, 2018c). The higher the commitment level, the higher the employee's attachment towards the organisation (Ndlovu et al., 2018). Employee commitment therefore refers to a bond between the employee and the organisation (Lo et al., 2010). A committed employee is likely to generate a competitive advantage to the organisation (Dhar, 2015), contributes to organisational performance and growth (Waribo, Akintayo, Osibanjo, & Fadeyi, 2019b), promotes team cohesion and goal congruency (Chai, Hwang, & Joo, 2017) and results in reduced turnover intention and absenteeism (Joubert, Madau, & Grobler, 2017; Lim, Loo, & Lee, 2017). The literature identifies three key features of employee commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990), namely affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. *Affective commitment* reflects an employee's positive emotional attachment to the organisation. Highly committed workers tend to identify with the goals and values of the organisation and desire to stay longer with the employer. *Continuance commitment* reflects a mindset where an employee decides to stay with

the employing organisation because of the perceptions of high costs (economic and social) of losing his or her membership with the employer. In addition, *normative commitment* reflects an employee's mindset to stay with the organisation because he or she feels obligated. A study by Wilkins, Butt and Annabi (2018) found that employee commitment is likely to increase the level of employee attendance and extra-role behaviours. Critical to this study, it was also found that employee commitment is affected by organisational values and justice (Alzayed, Jauhar, & Mohaidin, 2017; Ireferin & Mechanic, 2014).

Organisational justice

Organisational justice has also attracted the attention of scholars and human resource management practitioners (Bustaman & Tambi, 2018; Ledimo, 2015a, 2015b; Mitonga-Monga, 2018a, 2018b; Virtanen & Elovainio, 2018; Zeidan & Itani, 2020). This concept has developed out of the pre-existing conceptual framework of equity theory (Ndjaboué, Brisson, & Vézina, 2012). According to equity theory, individuals create beliefs about what would be a fair recognition for their work, and they tend to compare themselves to their peers, whom they consider as having the same duties and work status (Ibrahim & Perez, 2014). This comparison may lead to perceptions of unequal treatment between members of the employee group, which in turn could lead to potential negative outcomes in the form of a poor work attitude, work disengagement or reluctance to walk the extra mile (Ndjaboué et al., 2012). Equity theory points to probable emotional and physical problems as an indication of an association between inequity or injustice in the workplace (Ajala, 2015). Organisational justice is therefore defined as an equity rule and social norm that governs organisations, particularly in terms of resource and benefit distribution (Suifan, 2019). The literature identifies the following three components, namely distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice (Murtaza, Shad, Shahzad, Shah, & Khan, 2011). *Distributive justice* refers to an employee's perception of fairness regarding their output (i.e. salary and bonuses, job security, recognition, reputation and responsibilities and promotions) versus distribution amongst their peers. *Procedural justice* reflects an employee's perception of the methods, procedures and processes used by the organisation (Tebele, 2012) in distributing monetary and/or nonmonetary outcomes amongst workers (Murtaza et al., 2011). *Interactional justice* denotes an employee's treatment during the enactment of organisational procedures (Ajala, 2015). Previous research has found OJ as being related to job satisfaction (Ibrahim & Perez, 2014), employee commitment (Ajala, 2015) and organisational citizenship behaviour (Khalifa & Awad, 2018). For example, Li, Castaño and Li (2018) found OJ to be a powerful predictor of affective commitment, which is a type of commitment that has a strong influence on an employee's emotional attachment. Another stream of research on OJ has focused on the role of a leader in employee appraisal of (un)fair treatment (Karam et al., 2019). This research has

found that perceptions of positive leaders' behaviour related strongly with employee outcomes (Karam et al., 2019). Rupp, Shao, Jones and Liao (2014) indicated that justice researchers have identified the leader as an important source or guardian of justice. Leaders who emphasise justice are likely to contribute towards fair systems and procedures that may lead to the promotion of the organisation's image and effectiveness.

Transformational leadership

The concept of TL has attracted much observation from both scholars and practitioners alike (Le & Lei, 2019). Transformational leadership is currently one of the most attractive leadership styles (Elsaid & Mostafa, 2016; Van Zyl & Hofmeyr, 2021; Yi, Uddin, Das, Mahmood, & Sohel, 2019). In addition, prior studies indicate that it is perceived as one of the most effective leadership styles in determining positive employee behaviour outcomes (Atan & Mahmood, 2019; Buil, Martínez, & Matute, 2019; Chipunza & Matsumunyane, 2018; Elsaid & Mostafa, 2016; Khattak, Zolin, & Muhammad, 2020; Le & Lei, 2018, 2019; Mabasa, 2018). Transformational leadership refers to a leader inspiring his or her followers to adopt the vision of the organisation as if it were their own and focus their energy (Tebele, 2012) towards the achievement of collective goals (Engelbrecht & Samuel, 2019). Transformational leaders base their success in connecting employees' self-concepts to the interests and goals of the organisation, such that employees' attitudes and behaviours towards the organisation become self-expressive (Chai et al., 2017; Van Zyl & Hofmeyr, 2021). The literature identifies four transformational leader components, namely idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised inspiration (eds. Avolio & Bass, 2001). The first component, *idealised influence*, refers to the extent to which leaders' behaviours – such as sacrificing for the benefit of the group and demonstrating high ethical standards – inspire followers' admiration, respect and trust. The second component, *inspirational motivation*, comprises the creation and expression of an attractive vision of the future and the demonstration of optimism and enthusiasm. The third component, *intellectual stimulation*, comprises leader behaviours that increase awareness of problems and challenge followers to be innovative when reframing problems and resolving old situations in new ways (Engelbrecht & Samuel, 2019). Transformational leadership therefore encourages the employee to be more proactive and creative to enhance and develop new ideas and find new ways to resolve problems related to the organisation's product and process (Yi et al., 2019). Transformational leadership is reported to increase employee commitment and reduce worker turnover intention and absenteeism; this appears to be the case because it is the leader who empowers their team members to identify with the leader, shape their psychological attachment and display individual consideration towards the employee (Engelbrecht & Samuel, 2019). Previous research has provided some support for the link between TL, OJ and the link between justice and employee commitment (Ogbu Edeh & Ugwu, 2019).

The relationship between organisational justice and employee commitment

Research on the association between OJ and commitment is well documented (Kamselem, Maiyaki, & Sagagi, 2020; Primawidi & Mangundjaya, 2020; Ramamoorthy & Stringer, 2017; Veress & Gavreliuc, 2018). As conceptualised earlier, OJ refers to the perception of fairness (Tebele, 2012) by the employee concerning the process and procedures and rewards system in the organisation (Akram, Lei, Haider, & Hussain, 2019). Furthermore, OJ theory suggests that the decision-making processes and the outcomes of these decisions determine feelings of fairness at work (Nwokolo, Ifeanacho, & Anazodo, 2017). This in turn may influence their attitudes and behaviour (Hassan & Rokhman, 2012). A study by Esen and Keskin (2018) in the Turkish banking sector context found that OJ influences employee commitment. Cropanzano, Bowen and Gilliland (2007) indicate that OJ influences commitment through perceptions of trust. However, the perception of lack of fairness may influence an employee's decision to continue or terminate his or her membership with the organisation (Engelbrecht & Samuel, 2019). Organisational justice, as an employee's perceptions of workplace process, procedure, interaction and outcomes to be fair in nature, was reported to be a predictor of employee commitment (Ajala, 2015). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H1: Organisational justice has a positive statistical correlation with employees' level of commitment.

Transformational leadership as a moderator in the relationship between justice and commitment

Transformational leadership is perceived as one of the most effective leadership styles that can affect several organisational and employee outcomes, such as justice and commitment (Mauludin & Endang, 2018; Williams & Alshahrani, 2017). For example, Hassan and Rokhman (2012) reported that TL is related to OJ and to the employee who perceives their leader as being able to persuade and motivate them towards innovative thinking and behaviours, therefore resulting in a higher likelihood of commitment to the organisation. Furthermore, Hendrikz and Engelbrecht (2019) reported that TL, through generating a positive climate in the organisation that favours justice, respecting processes and procedures, likely increases the employee commitment level, as they believe that they need to repay their leader for creating a conducive work environment (Chai et al., 2017). These findings were supported by Mitonga-Monga (2018b), who reported that organisational factors such as climate influenced the employees' level of commitment through OJ. Almutairi (2016) studied the moderating effect of TL on the relationship between justice and performance and found that TL influenced justice and performance. This implies that employees who perceive positive leadership and a fair work environment would likely devote all their skills and abilities to their organisation. Therefore, the second hypothesis is proposed as follows:

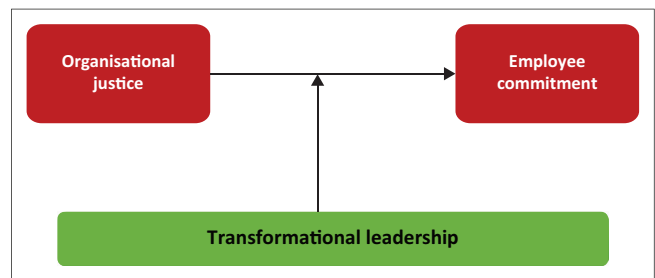


FIGURE 1: Conceptual framework.

H2: TL moderates the relationship between OJ and employee commitment.

Based on these concepts and discussions of previous studies, the conceptual framework that describes the moderating effect of TL on the relationship between OJ and employee commitment is shown in Figure 1.

Research design

Research approach

This study used a quantitative approach, as it is appropriate for studies that focus on quantifying the data collection and analysis, and it adopts a deductive approach (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014), which was also deemed the most effective approach to address the research problem, aims and objectives of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The postpositivist empirical paradigm allowed for the collection of employee fairness perceptions, existing employee commitment levels and TL behaviours present in the organisation. It provided a near-accurate description of the laws and mechanisms which operate in social life, in this instance the customer service car rental organisation. The statistical data analysis allowed for a measurement and explanation of the relationship that exists between the OJ, employee commitment and TL variables.

Participants

The target population of this study were employees working in a car rental organisation in South Africa. The population size was $n = 474$. The participants included managerial, nonmanagerial and support employee groups from different gender, ethnic group, educational background and seniority levels (see Table 1). The majority of the sample consisted of women (67.6%) between the age of 18 and 20 years (27.9%). The racial demographics consisted of 71.2% black employees, 17.1% white employees, 6.3% Indian employees and 5.4% mixed race employees. Most of the participants had a higher certificate or diploma (54.1%), worked for the company for 1–3 years (38.7%) and were single (47.7%).

Measuring instruments

The Organisational Justice Questionnaire (OJQ) was used to measure the employee perceptions of fairness in the organisation. The OJQ (Niehoff & Moorman, 1993) is a self-reported instrument that consists of 20 items, measuring the

employee's perceptions of fairness in the workplace. The core components of OJ measured by the OJQ are distributive justice (effort, experience, commitment rewards, pay, benefits, challenge and responsibility), procedural justice (employer fairness, sincerity and rationality as they relate to the methods, mechanisms and processes used to determine outcomes) and interactional justice (open and honest communications, providing vital information and discussing expectations). The responses were scored on a seven-point Likert scale format (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree). Examples of items from the measure are: 'Does he or she treat you with dignity?' and 'Is he or she candid when communicating with you?' High response aggregates indicate high levels of OJ. Van Vuuren, Dhurup, and Joubert (2016) reported an internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranging from 0.83 to 0.95. In the current study, internal consistency coefficients for scores from the OJQ ranged from 0.89 to 0.96.

The Employee Commitment Scale (OCS) was used to measure employee perceptions of commitment in the organisation. The OCS (Allen & Meyer, 1993) is a self-reported instrument

TABLE 1: Profile of the sample ($n = 111$).

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	36	32.4
Female	75	67.6
Age		
18–20 years	31	27.9
20–25 years	22	19.8
26–30 years	21	18.9
31–35 years	9	8.1
36–40 years	5	4.5
41–45 years	1	0.9
46–50 years	3	2.7
51–55 years	1	0.9
56–60 years	1	0.9
66–70 years	17	15.3
Educational level		
Grades 1–9	1	0.9
Grades 10–12	49	44.1
Higher certificate, diploma	60	54.1
Degree	1	0.9
Seniority		
Below year	33	29.7
1–3 years	43	38.7
4–6 years	13	11.7
7–9 years	8	7.2
10–12 years	4	3.6
15–15 years	7	6.3
16–19 years	3	2.7
Marital status		
Single	53	47.7
Married	29	26.1
Divorced	6	5.4
In a relationship	22	19.8
Stay together	1	0.9
Ethnic group		
Black people	79	71.2
Mixed race people	6	5.4
Indian people	7	6.3
White people	19	17.1

that consists of a 19-item scale measuring the employees' level of commitment. The core dimensions are affective commitment (the extent to which an employee wants to remain with the organisation, cares about the organisation and is willing to exert effort on its behalf), continuance commitment (cost of staying versus costs associated with leaving a company) and normative commitment (feeling obligated to stay with the employer). The subscales were scored on a seven-point Likert scale format (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree). Examples of items from the measure are as follows: 'This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me' and 'I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organisation'. Mitonga-Monga, Flotman and Cilliers (2018) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranging from 0.86 to 0.94. The present study obtained an internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranging from 0.73 to 0.83 for the OCS.

The TL Questionnaire (TLQ) was used to measure and assess aspects of employee leadership behaviour and style. The TLQ (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999) is a self-reported measure and consists of a 21-item instrument measuring employees' perceptions of their leader's behaviours. The core components consist of idealised influence (behaviours that encourage followers to identify with the leader), inspirational motivation (the extent to which a leader creates a vision that inspires followers), intellectual stimulation (the extent to which a leader challenges assumptions and encourages others to take risks) and individual consideration (when a leader seeks to meet his or her individual needs or those of the followers). The TLQ was scored in a five-point Likert scale (1 = frequently, 5 = not at all). Examples of items from the measure are 'I make others feel good to be around me' and 'I help others find meaning in their work.' Ndlovu (2017) reported reliability coefficients ranging between 0.89 and 0.90 for the TLQ. Baxter, Hayward and Amos (2008) and Kirabira (2010) reported Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of values ranging from 0.74 to 0.94, with 0.74 specifically for the TLQ. The present study yielded an internal Cronbach's alpha

TABLE 2: Descriptive statistics mean, standard deviations, skewness, Kurtosis and Cronbach's alpha coefficients ($n = 111$).

Variables	Mean	Standard deviations	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's alpha coefficients
Overall TL	2.38	0.61	0.292	0.03	0.87
Idealised influence	2.03	0.74	0.712	0.48	0.75
Inspirational	2.28	0.96	2.39	13.45	0.35
Intellectual	2.54	0.79	-0.07	-0.69	0.59
Individual	2.19	0.83	0.45	-0.53	0.70
Overall organisational justice	2.99	1.00	0.24	1.11	0.95
Procedural justice	3.37	1.30	0.37	0.26	0.89
Distributive justice	2.99	1.08	0.22	0.93	0.90
Interactive justice	2.80	1.12	0.13	0.42	0.96
Overall employee commitment	3.73	0.73	0.34	1.90	0.82
Affective commitment	4.01	0.71	0.05	1.75	0.82
Continuance commitment	3.74	0.82	0.07	1.67	0.73
Normative commitment	3.17	1.21	0.14	0.30	0.83

TL, transformational leadership.

coefficient with value ranging from a low of 0.35 to an acceptable high of 0.85 for the TLQ (see Table 2).

Research procedure

Paper-based surveys were used to collect data from a sample of permanently employed car rental staff. The population consisted of car rental employees from numerous branches in the nine provinces of South Africa. The database containing the list of staff members was obtained from the human resources department. Only permanently employed staff were selected to form part of the sample for this study. An email invitation to participate in the study was sent out to these respondents. The respondents were requested to voluntarily participate in the research by completing the questionnaires. The paper-based questionnaires were sent to the respondents through the company's internal mail courier system. A letter was included to explain the purpose of the study, addressing potential ethical concerns such as confidentiality, anonymity and freedom of choice to participate in the study.

Confidentiality was ensured throughout the study and the responses received were dealt with anonymously, with random codes assigned to respondents. To ensure that the respondents consented to participate in the study, they were asked to sign and date research participant consent forms. The researcher was available to answer any questions and address any concerns in person, via email and telephonically. The completed questionnaires were kept in a secure place. Only the researcher had the necessary access to send reminders, tally and view the number of completed questionnaires.

Statistical analysis

The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 programme (Kumar, 2019). In the first stage, the descriptive statistics methods such as mean, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis were used to calculate the measure of central tendency, dispersion and distribution of the data (Zhang, 2016). In the second stage, correlation was used to determine the linear relationship between the variables under study (Rahman, Shahzad, Mustafa, Khan, & Qurashi, 2016). The practical significance for the correlations was set at 0.30 for medium and 0.50 for large effect when r was 0.50 (Cohen, 1988). In the third stage, hierarchical regression analyses were performed to determine if TL moderates the relationship between OJ and employee commitment. The sequence of simple slope tests for the regression model was adhered to, and the rescaled mean-centred values (Afshartous & Preston, 2011) were used for the regression analysis. To counter the probability of Type 1 errors, the significance value was set at 95% confidence interval level ($p \leq 0.05$).

Ethical considerations

Permission was obtained from the Human Resource Management Department to conduct the research study within the car rental company. Ethical clearance to conduct the research (reference no. 2018_CEMS/IOP_021) was also

obtained from the University of South Africa College of Economic and Management Sciences/Industrial and Organisational Psychology Research Ethics Review Committee.

Research results

Descriptive statistics

Means and standard deviations of the transformational leadership questionnaire

Table 2 shows that intellectualised scored ($M = 2.54$; standard deviation [SD] = 0.79), overall TL ($M = 2.38$; SD = 0.61), inspirational ($M = 2.28$; .96), individualised ($M = 2.19$; SD = 0.83) and idealised influence ($M = 2.03$; SD = 0.74).

Means and standard deviations of the organisational justice questionnaire

Table 2 shows that procedural justice scored ($M = 3.37$; SD = 1.30), overall OJ ($M = 2.99$; SD = 1.00), distributive justice scored ($M = 2.99$; SD = 1.08) and interactive justice ($M = 2.80$; SD = 1.12).

Means and standard deviations of the employee commitment scale

Table 2 shows that affective commitment scored ($M = 4.01$; SD = 0.71), continuance commitment ($M = 3.74$; SD = 0.82), overall employee commitment ($M = 3.73$; SD = 0.73) and normative commitment scored ($M = 3.17$; SD = 1.21).

Correlational analysis

This section discusses the nature of the interrelationships between the variables in relation to the research hypotheses H1 in the study. The strength and the direction of the relationships between each of the variables of each instrument are identified and discussed.

Reporting on Pearson product-moment correlations coefficients (Transformational Leadership Questionnaire, Organisational Justice Questionnaire, Organisational Commitment Scale)

Table 3 indicates that significant relationships were observed between TLQ, OJQ and OCS variables.

The perception of TL revealed a significant relationship with:

- idealised influence ($r = 0.76$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- inspirational ($r = 0.70$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- intellectualised ($r = 0.73$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- individualised ($r = 0.82$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$).

The perception of idealised influence revealed a significant relationship with:

- intellectual stimulation ($r = 0.52$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- inspirational ($r = 0.46$; medium practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)

TABLE 3: Correlations between Transformational Leadership Questionnaire, Organisational Justice Questionnaire and Organisational Commitment Scale ($n = 111$).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Overall TL	1	0.76***	0.70***	0.73***	0.82***	0.79***	0.78***	0.52***	-0.10	0.02	-0.17	-0.10	0.13	0.12	0.11	-0.08
Idealised influence	-	1	0.52***	0.46**	0.64***	0.53***	0.54***	0.25*	-0.04	0.08	-0.11	-0.06	0.09	0.05	0.09	-0.05
Inspirational	-	-	1	0.38**	0.42**	0.43**	0.48**	0.26*	-0.07	-0.03	-0.12	-0.05	0.09	0.04	0.14	-0.01
Intellectual	-	-	-	1	0.69***	0.59***	0.49**	0.13	-0.05	0.07	-0.12	-0.05	0.05	0.12	-0.03	-0.06
Individual	-	-	-	-	1	0.69***	0.54***	0.24*	-0.12	0.06	-0.17	-0.16	0.06	0.12	0.04	-0.16
Overall organisational justice	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	0.75***	0.90***	0.92***	0.61***	0.57***	0.50***	0.89***
Procedural justice	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	0.55***	0.51***	0.55***	0.56***	0.41**	0.48**
Distributive justice	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	0.79***	0.49**	0.44**	0.45**	0.77***
Interactive justice	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	0.54***	0.49**	0.44**	0.76***
Overall employee commitment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.81***	0.83***	0.56***
Affective commitment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.43**	0.48**
Continuance commitment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.48**
Normative commitment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1

TL, transformational leadership.

*, $r \geq 0.29$ (small effect); **, $r \geq 0.30 \geq r \leq 0.49$ (medium effect); ***, $r \geq 0.50$ (large effect).

- intellectualised ($r = 0.64$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- individualised ($r = 0.53$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$).

The perception of inspirational revealed a significant relationship with:

- intellectualised ($r = 0.38$; medium practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- individualised ($r = 0.42$; medium practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$).

The perception of intellectualised revealed a significant relationship with:

- individualised ($r = 0.69$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$).

The perception of overall OJ revealed a significant relationship with:

- procedural justice ($r = 0.75$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- distributive justice ($r = 0.90$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- interactive justice ($r = 0.92$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- overall employee commitment ($r = 0.61$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- affective commitment ($r = 0.57$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$)
- continuance commitment ($r = 0.50$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$)
- normative commitment ($r = 0.88$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$).

The perception of procedural justice revealed a significant relationship with:

- distributive justice ($r = 0.55$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- interactive justice ($r = 0.51$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- overall employee commitment ($r = 0.55$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- affective commitment ($r = 0.56$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$)
- continuance commitment ($r = 0.41$; medium practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$)

- normative comment ($r = 0.48$; medium practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$).

The perception of distributive justice revealed a significant relationship with:

- interactive justice ($r = 0.79$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- overall employee commitment ($r = 0.49$; medium practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- affective commitment ($r = 0.44$; medium practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$)
- continuance commitment ($r = 0.45$; medium practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$)
- normative commitment ($r = 0.77$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$).

The perception of interactive justice revealed a significant relationship with:

- overall employee commitment ($r = 0.54$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)
- affective commitment ($r = 0.49$; medium practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$)
- continuance commitment ($r = 0.44$; medium practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$)
- normative commitment ($r = 0.76$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$).

The perception of overall employee commitment revealed a significant relationship with:

- affective commitment ($r = 0.81$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$)
- continuance commitment ($r = 0.83$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$)
- normative commitment ($r = 0.56$; large practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$).

The perception of affective commitment revealed a significant relationship with:

- continuance commitment ($r = 0.43$; medium practical effect size; $p \leq 0.001$)

TABLE 4: Hayes' process regression matrix for moderating effect of transformational leadership on the relationship between organisational justice and employee commitment ($n = 111$).

Variables	β	SEs	t	p	95% confidence interval		R	R^2
					LLCI	ULCI		
Constant	65.21	1.11	58.88	0.00	63.01	67.41	0.66	0.42
Overall organisational justice	0.51***	0.06	8.98	0.00	0.40	0.63	-	-
Overall TL	0.22**	0.09	2.52	0.01	0.05	0.39	-	-
Interaction_1	0.01*	0.01	2.43	0.02	0.00	0.02	-	-

Source: Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112(1), 155–159. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.112.1.155>

TL, transformational leadership; LLCI, lower level confidence interval; ULCI, upper level confidence interval.

*, $p \leq 0.05$; **, $p \leq 0.01$; ***, $p \leq 0.001$.

- normative commitment ($r = 0.48$; medium practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$).

The perception of continuance commitment revealed a significant relationship with:

- normative commitment ($r = 0.48$; medium practical effect size; $p \leq 0.01$).

Reporting on the hierarchical moderated regression analysis

Hierarchical regression analyses were performed to determine whether TL acted as a moderator in the relationship between OJ and employee commitment.

The hierarchical regression analysis was performed via the conditional Process Macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2018). Hayes (2018) provided various types of model templates showing the moderating effect of a variable M on the relationship between an independent variable X and a dependent variable Y . In the present study, TL was identified as a moderator in the relationship between OJ (independent variable) and employee commitment (dependent variable). As can be observed in Table 4, using Hayes' Process Macro in SPSS, the coefficients, standard errors and a 95% confidence interval were calculated. Two independent variables and the interaction termed were entered into the models. For the variable OJ and employee commitment, the analysis shows a significant moderating effect of TL, confirming the hypothesis that TL has a moderating effect on the relationship between OJ and employee commitment. Both TL and OJ were found to be statistically significant.

As shown in Table 4, in terms of the main effects, OJ acted as a significant predictor of subjective norms ($F[3, 107] = 27.87$; $p \leq 0.05$), ($B = 0.51$; Standard Error of B [SEB] = 0.06; 95% CI = [0.40; 0.63]; $p < 0.05$), denoting that OJ is associated with an increase in the percentage of employee commitment.

The interactions were explored using a simple slope test and by graphing the interactions using the value of the moderator at the mean, as well as standard deviations above and below the mean (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2013). As illustrated in Figure 2, the relationship between OJ and employee commitment was stronger for participants who perceived a high level of TL than for those who perceived a low level of TL. The participants who scored high on OJ also achieved

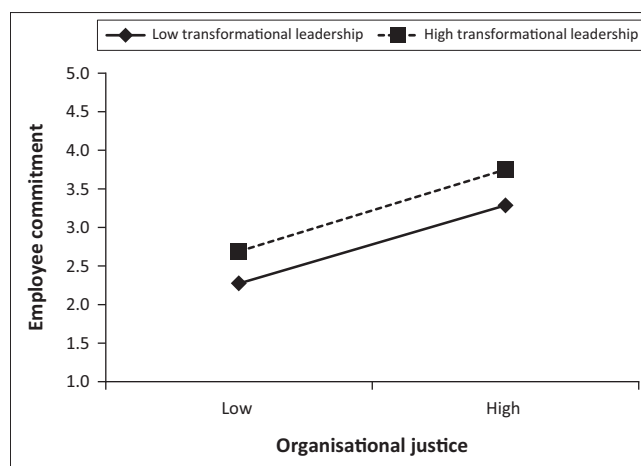


FIGURE 2: Interaction effects between transformational leadership, organisational justice and employee commitment.

significantly higher scores than their counterparts on the employee commitment.

Discussion of findings

The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between OJ and employee commitment and to examine whether TL has a moderating effect on the relationship between the two within a customer service car rental organisation. In this section, the following are discussed: (1) the relationship between OJ and employee commitment and (2) the moderating effect of TL on the relationship between OJ and employee commitment.

Relating transformational leadership, organisational justice and employee commitment

No significant correlations were found between TL and OJ. Transformational leadership did not correlate with OJ. This is in contrast with Hassan and Rokhman's (2011) and Engelbrecht and Samuel's (2019) findings that TL can be associated with OJ. Furthermore, no significant correlations were found between TL and employee commitment. In contrast, Al-Yami et al. (2018) reported that TL influenced employee commitment.

The absence of correlation between OJ, employee commitment and TL could be attributed to the following reasons: firstly, it is possible that TL, to the extent of creating fair perceptions for the employee, is not a standard practice amongst the majority of supervisors and managers of the

organisation. Secondly, most of the employees who participated in the study may have no long-term desires to remain within the organisation. The fact that most of them are at entry-level positions possibly indicates that working at the organisation is perceived as a stepping stone to better opportunities outside of the organisation, which could explain the high turnover levels experienced at this level. Thirdly, Fink and Reiners (2006), Yang, Jin, and Hao (2009) and Oliveira, Carravilla, Oliveira and Costa (2019) suggested that owing to the economic conditions and the competitive nature of the car rental industry, the focus of car rental organisations is predominantly on: (1) creating an affordable and flexible capital structure; (2) focusing on increasing productivity and creating more efficient business infrastructure which optimally utilises all the company assets; (3) strengthening the organisation's brand name and focusing growth on core areas; and (4) continued focus on improved service by the employee. However, the majority of supervisors and managers could lack sufficient TL 21st century competencies in creating an environment which places importance on behavioural attitudes and behaviours which are centred around OJ and employee commitment. Whilst employee behaviours are important, they are of secondary importance to facilities, processes and procedures in service design in the car rental industry. This can be seen industry-wide (Khwaja & Yang, 2014, 2018).

Relationship between organisational justice and employee commitment

The results suggested that OJ correlated with employee commitment. This implies that participants who perceived their organisation to be fair and who strive for their own welfare seem to be more committed to the organisation than other participants. Participants who perceived their organisation's systems to be ethical, consistent, precise and devoid of potential discrimination seemed to perceive a higher level of overall employee commitment, show psychological attachment and express sentiments to stay or extend their stay with the employing organisation. These findings are consistent with those of Waribo et al. (2020), who reported that employees' perceptions of the fairness processes in the organisation related positively with their perceptions of employee commitment. In a similar study, Turgut, Tokmak and Gucl (2012) stated that fairness plays an important role in employee evaluation of the workplace environment. An employee who has positive feelings of perceived fairness is more committed to the organisation, which leads to increased levels of organisational success.

The results further suggest that OJ correlates with affective commitment. These can be explained by the fact that when employees perceive fairness in the decisions regarding their welfare and well-being, they would likely be emotionally attached to the organisation. The employee who perceives fairness in the organisation's processes such as remuneration and performance appraisals would likely tend to demonstrate a high level of affective commitment. These findings mirror those by Suifan (2019) and Ogbu Edeh and Ugwu (2019),

who found that employees' perceptions of positive OJ are crucial as it could influence their behaviour and attitudes that could ultimately lead to organisational performance.

A significant positive correlation was found between OJ and continuance commitment, indicating that when employees perceive justice and fairness in their organisations' processes, procedures and reward mechanisms, they would likely evaluate the costs associated with leaving and decide to extend their membership with the organisation. These findings corroborate the findings of Nazim and Shahid (2012) and Ajala (2015), who reported that procedural justice, distributive justice and interactional justice perceptions are related to and with continuance commitment.

The results also suggest that OJ relates to normative commitment. This implies that when an employee believes that fairness is appraised with respect to recruitment, remuneration, training and development, as well as the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making processes and promotion, he or she would likely feel obliged to stay with the organisation. These findings are similar to the work of Afshar Somayyeh, Mohsen and Zahed (2013) and Waribo et al. (2019a), who found OJ to be positively related to normative commitment.

Transformational leadership as a moderator of the relationship between organisational justice and employee commitment

The findings also indicate TL to moderate the relationship between OJ and employee commitment. This implies that when employees perceived their leader to facilitate and encourage them to express their concerns and act in an ethical manner, they are likely to perceive fairness in the organisation and develop a consistent desire to stay with the employing organisation. Upholding of positive leadership behaviours in the organisation, together with fair treatment and respect, increase employees' loyalty and intention to continue working for the employer. These findings corroborate that of Engelbrecht, Kemp and Mahembe (2018), who found TL to predict OJ and commitment. Therefore, leadership is encouraged to exhibit TL behaviour in order to foster a fair and ethical climate in the organisation. This, in turn, would enhance employee commitment to the organisation and possibly their willingness to stay with the employer. Perhaps this is the kind of leadership style that should be invested in during our current and post-COVID-19 business environment and even more so in the current highly uncertain, turbulent and competitive customer services environment.

Practical and managerial implications of the findings

The results of this study suggest a variety of practical implications for business and leadership practices in organisations as the new COVID ('post-COVID') business world unfolds. Firstly, the study has implications for strategic business practices in general and the formulation

of human resource policies regarding employee commitment and retention (Engelbrecht & Samuel, 2019; Hendricks, 2017). Based on these findings, management may consider it most important to create a 'fair work environment' (either working from home, the return to the workplace or a hybrid work model), which may enhance or encourage the employee to identify and engage proactively with organisational goals (Abasilim, Gberevbie, & Osibanjo, 2019). The study reveals that the perceptions of fair treatment, compassion, respect and ethical conduct have a direct influence on the employee's decision to stay or quit the organisation (Mitonga-Monga, Flotman, & Moerane, 2019). If the employee perceives justice and fairness in the organisational processes, such as reward mechanisms, training, development and promotion, these will positively influence their level of commitment (Eliyana & Ma'arif, 2019; Hardy, 2019).

The study further indicates that TL influenced employees' perceptions of OJ and their psychological attachment (Ndlovu, 2017). Organisations should therefore select for and train its managers on TL competencies or behaviours (Hardy, 2019). Such behaviours are expected to positively influence OJ as well as employee commitment (Rooney, 2019). This may decrease the perceptions of unfairness and turnover intention of employees who feel that they have been actively involved in organisational decision-making, have been consulted during adversity and have received fair treatment from their leaders and the organisation (Hendrikz & Engelbrecht, 2019).

Managers should strive to create a fair work environment so that organisational resources and rewards are seen to be fairly distributed and organisational procedures adopted in the decision-making concerning the welfare, well-being and career development, which in turn may lower employee intention to quit (Divya & Sunganthi, 2018; Rooney, 2019).

Limitations and recommendations for future research

This study has several limitations. The first limitation is inherent to the methodology used. This study used a nonprobability sampling procedure and a cross-sectional research design. The sampling procedure raises a concern about the representativeness of the respondents and the ability to generalise the results of the study. This study should be replicated by using a bigger, more representative sample and using a longitudinal design to determine causality. The second limitation is that the sample was from one customer car rental service organisation in South Africa, which is the reason why this sample cannot be generalised to other industries in the same country or other developing countries.

Future studies should seek to examine the effects of other leadership styles such as ethical leadership, responsible leadership and authentic leadership (Abasilim et al., 2019;

Akay & Demirel, 2017; Scheepers & Storm, 2019) on the relationship between OJ and employee commitment. A qualitative approach could also be adopted to explore why there are such divergent views regarding the relationship between the variables of this study.

Conclusion

Transformational leadership and OJ were found to contribute towards employees' commitment. Based on the overall analysis, it is difficult to conclude that TL is associated with OJ and employee commitment. However, it can be safely concluded that there is a relationship between OJ and employee commitment.

Hierarchical moderator regression analysis revealed that TL moderated the relationship between OJ and employee commitment to a great extent. From the overall results of the study, it can be concluded that if these factors are present and enhanced in the car rental customer service organisation, they could encourage employees to demonstrate high levels of commitment and desire to remain with the employing organisation.

Owing to the radical rupture, constant re-engineering efforts and the decline in service sales and profits in the car rental industry, coupled with uncertainty of when operations will get back to 'normal', it has become more important for organisations to have strong transformational leaders and for the surviving employees to cope with the challenges presented by the pandemic (Cokayne, 2020a, 2020b; Mashego, 2020). Additional managerial implications during the COVID-19 pandemic include the promotion of TL knowledge management behaviours, which can empower the employee to use knowledge and learning to build critical capabilities essential for car rental organisational innovation, such as agility, flexibility and the ability to adapt to crisis situations (Akay & Demirel, 2017). The pandemic has also placed a spotlight on employees' psychological well-being and its subsequent effect on OJ perceptions and employee levels (Hamouche, 2020). To help mitigate the stress levels, organisational transformational leaders (supervisors and managers) in conjunction with the human resource department need to develop policies and procedures in conjunction with government COVID-19 regulations to protect, educate and train employees on the pandemic and future pandemics (Donald, 2020; Hecker, 2020).

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Authors' contributions

A.B.K. was responsible for the conceptualisation, formal analysis, project management, methodology and writing of this article. A.P.F. contributed towards the methodology, formal analysis, writing and supervision of the study. J.M.M. contributed towards the methodology, validation, data curation and writing of this article.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

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