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Understanding Followers' Perceptions: Investigating the Relationship Between Women's Leadership Styles, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the role of gender diversity in leadership styles, specifically focusing on how women's transformational and transactional leadership approaches affect organizational commitment. In addition, the study examined how job satisfaction may mediate the relationship between these leadership styles and organizational commitment. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through surveys from 302 followers of female academics at various institutions. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the direct and indirect effects of women's leadership styles on organizational outcomes. The findings indicated that women's transformational leadership did not have a direct effect on organizational commitment, although job satisfaction fully mediated this relationship. Conversely, no direct or indirect effects were observed for women's transactional leadership on organizational commitment, as job satisfaction did not mediate this relationship. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of gender diversity in leadership by shedding light on the behaviors of employees under female leadership and strengthens previous empirical research on this topic. Practical Implications: In Pakistan, where women are increasingly occupying leadership roles, the study offers valuable insights for current and aspiring female leaders and provides empirical evidence on how they can influence job satisfaction and organizational commitment among their followers. The research addresses an unknown aspect of gender diversity in leadership in organizational contexts and sets the stage for further investigations on women's leadership in professional settings.

Keywords: Leadership, Women, Job satisfaction, Transformational leadership, Organizational behavior

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Introduction

The quest to enhance executive or leadership effectiveness is a primary concern for every business manager, but how can this skill be acquired? Are these traits inherent, or can they be developed? How do individuals achieve such leadership greatness? [1]. These questions have long intrigued researchers, prompting further exploration. Leadership, being a historical concept, has been subject to various interpretations. Early scholars believed leadership was innate, often described by the great man theory [2]. However, later research challenged this view, giving rise to several leadership theories [3]. Trait theorists, for instance, identified certain qualities that distinguished leaders from others [4], and numerous lists were created to define these leadership traits. The behavioral approach further divided leadership into two main categories: task-oriented and relationship-oriented leaders [5]. Although open management was initially discussed by scholars like Chester Barnard and Peter Drucker, the concept became more prominent as situational or contingency theory in the 1970s, addressing management issues—



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including leadership—while criticizing the rigid approaches of earlier theories [6]. The situational perspective emerged because no universal leadership traits or behaviors could be applied universally to all leaders. A wealth of research has focused on various leadership styles and their implications. For example, Haider *et al.* [7] examined the influence of destructive leadership behaviors on turnover intentions and deviant behaviors in pharmaceutical companies, with job stress serving as a mediator. A review paper indicated that transformational leadership has become the dominant focus in leadership research, followed by shared leadership, with collective leadership being the third area of interest [8].

Despite increasing awareness, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles across various sectors, including politics and academic institutions [9]. Traditionally, women have been associated with communal traits such as caring for others, while men are seen as embodying rationality, agency, and self-reliance—traits often linked to dominance and self-confidence [10]. This view aligns with studies on human and social capital in women's entrepreneurial leadership, which highlighted that women's communal qualities, such as warmth and sensitivity, are vital for success in women-dominated industries. However, to thrive in the broader, male-dominated environment, women need to exhibit more agentic traits [11, 12]. These characteristics often define effective leadership and have led to the perception that men are better suited for leadership roles than women [13]. Preliminary studies examining the impact of gender-based expectations on women's leadership revealed that women frequently encounter social identity contingencies like stereotypes, restrictions, judgments, and limited opportunities, which are tied to their communal identity. This, in turn, leads to stereotype threats [14]. Such threats hinder women in leadership positions across various professions, from law to academic medicine [15], and negatively affect their leadership aspirations and performance, resulting in fewer women in leadership roles [16]. Further studies have indicated that women tend to adopt more transformational leadership styles, characterized by interactive and participatory methods, rather than relying on positional power [17]. This trend is evident in countries like Nigeria, where female leaders are more likely to adopt transformational and democratic leadership styles, guiding employees toward the organization's mission and vision [18]. Additionally, research shows that women often display democratic, collaborative, and cooperative leadership approaches, contrasting with the directive, autocratic, and competitive styles typically associated with men [9].

Given this context, the present study aimed to investigate the influence of women's leadership styles, particularly transformational and transactional leadership, on organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Research objectives

- To examine how women's transformational leadership style affects employee job satisfaction.
- To assess the impact of women's transactional leadership style on employee job satisfaction.
- To evaluate the influence of women's leadership styles on followers' organizational commitment.

Literature review

Leadership as a concept has intrigued scholars for centuries, with numerous studies aiming to expand the understanding of its various dimensions [19]. While leadership has long been a topic of human interaction, academic inquiry into it began when it became a focus of systematic research. The study of leadership is often divided into major theoretical milestones, with this study specifically concentrating on the transactional and transformational leadership theories, which have been extensively researched over the past few decades [20].

Transformational and transactional leadership

The distinction between transformational and transactional leadership lies in how leaders motivate their followers. Transformational leaders inspire and elevate followers by appealing to their values and emotional drivers, while transactional leaders emphasize rewards and exchanges [21]. By blending both approaches, leaders can boost an organization's capacity to create knowledge, foster collaboration, and improve decision-making [22]. Studies consistently show that leadership practices correlate with various employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall performance [23].

Transformational leadership and organizational commitment

Extensive research has established a positive connection between transformational leadership and organizational commitment [24-27]. At the senior level, transformational leadership has been shown to foster stronger organizational commitment compared to the evaluation of leadership at lower levels [28]. However, organizational outcomes are influenced by contextual factors, which can lead to varying results [29]. Factors like employee performance and withdrawal behaviors are linked to organizational commitment and job satisfaction [27, 30]. Transformational leaders can effectively nurture organizational commitment by cultivating a sense of collective responsibility and emphasizing the importance of selflessness for the organization's benefit [31]. This leadership style has proven to be a valuable tool in managerial development [27, 32].

Transformational leadership and job satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to the positive emotional and cognitive responses that individuals have toward their work [33]. Both job satisfaction and organizational commitment are central to workplace studies because they directly impact an organization's performance [34, 35]. Investigating how transformational leadership influences these outcomes provides a clearer understanding of its broader effects on the workforce [36]. Additionally, there is evidence suggesting that transactional leadership can also affect job satisfaction [37]. In recent years, transformational leadership has gained significant prominence in both public and private sectors [31, 38, 39]. Organizations seeking to enhance job satisfaction must adopt leadership strategies that align with the overall goals and structure of the company [37].

Organizational commitment and transactional leadership

Transactional leadership guides employees by clarifying expectations and performance standards, helping them identify their roles within the organization, and fostering a connection between individual and organizational goals. Research has shown that transactional leadership has a stronger positive impact on individuals with a well-defined self-concept [40, 41]. Those with an interconnected self-view are more likely to act in ways that emphasize their connection to others and their alignment with the organization's goals, even when the leadership style focuses more on task completion rather than fostering a deep connection with the organization [42].

Job satisfaction and transactional leadership

Organizations that prioritize learning orientations tend to see a more favorable impact on employee job satisfaction. Employees report lower satisfaction with factors like salary, benefits, work conditions, and communication, but higher satisfaction with aspects such as job nature, coworkers, and supervisory style [43]. Thus, a clear link exists between leadership styles and employees' job satisfaction [44].

Despite the extensive exploration of leadership styles, the question of how transformational or transactional leadership, when practiced by women, affects job satisfaction and organizational commitment remains underexplored.

Materials and Methods

This study was based on the positivist philosophy [45] and classified as basic research with a cross-sectional time frame. A deductive approach was adopted, with the survey method chosen for data collection and a quantitative research design employed. The primary aim of this study was to assess the impact of women's leadership styles on the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of their followers. Thus, a structured, close-ended questionnaire was used [46].

The study targeted employees who had been under the leadership of women for at least one year. This duration allowed respondents to form a comprehensive perspective on the impact of their leadership styles. Due to the unavailability of a clear sampling frame, a non-probability sampling method was selected [47]. Data was gathered from 302 participants.

The following scales were used to measure the key variables:

- Transformational Leadership: A seven-item scale based on the Likert model [48].
- Transactional Leadership: A nine-item Likert scale instrument [49].
- Job Satisfaction: A four-item scale was used to measure job satisfaction [50].
- Organizational Commitment: A four-item Likert scale was utilized to assess organizational commitment [51].

Conceptual framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework employed in this study.

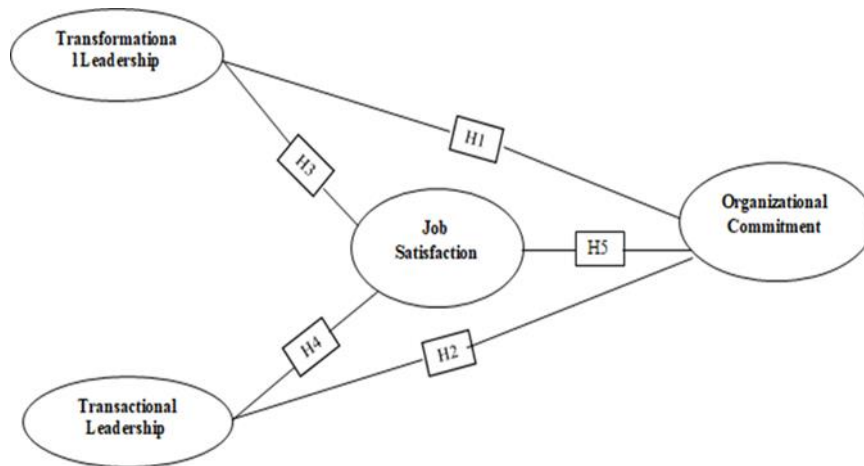


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of the study

Hypotheses

1. Women's transformational leadership style has a positive direct influence on followers' organizational commitment.
2. Women's transformational leadership style positively affects followers' job satisfaction.
3. Job satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment.
4. There is no direct effect of women's transactional leadership style on followers' organizational commitment.
5. Women's transactional leadership style does not influence job satisfaction.
6. Job satisfaction does not mediate the relationship between transactional leadership and organizational commitment.

Data analysis

To assess the constructs, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, and the model fit indices were evaluated. The mediation effects were tested following the procedure outlined by Hair *et al.* [52].

Results and Discussion

Demographic information

The survey gathered responses from a total of 302 individuals, including 170 males (56.3%) and 132 females (43.7%), as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	170	56.3
Female	132	43.7
Total	302	100

Among the 302 respondents, 159 were employed in public sector organizations, as illustrated in **Table 2**, while 143 worked in private sector companies. Consequently, a larger proportion of the respondents, approximately 52.6%, were affiliated with the public sector.

Table 2. Sector-wise classification

Sector	Frequency	Percentage
Public	159	52.6
Private	143	47.4
Total	302	100

The demographic data from the 302 respondents, detailed in **Table 3**, indicated that 73 individuals, or 24.2%, were between the ages of 25 and 30. A total of 62 participants, accounting for 20.5%, fell within the 31 to 35 age range. Additionally, 64 individuals, or 21.2%, were aged between 36 and 40 years. Another 39 respondents, representing 12.9%, were in the 41 to 45 age bracket, while 25 participants, or 8.3%, were aged between 51 and 55 years.

Table 3. Age-wise classification

Age (years)	Frequency	Percentage
25-30	73	24.2
31-35	62	20.5
36-40	64	21.2
41-45	39	12.9
46-50	39	12.9
51-55	25	8.3
Total	302	100

In terms of job experience, the largest group of respondents had between 4 and 6 years of work experience, comprising 101 individuals, or 33.4% of the total sample. The second-largest group consisted of 86 respondents, making up 28.5%, who had between 1 and 3 years of experience. A total of 70 respondents, or 23.2%, had seven to nine years of work experience. The smallest group, representing 14.9% of the sample, included 45 individuals with 10 or more years of experience.

Descriptive information

Regarding the descriptive statistics, the mean values for transformational leadership (TFL), transactional leadership (TSL), job satisfaction (JS), and organizational commitment (OC) were calculated. TFL had a mean of 24.12 with a standard deviation of 7.88, TSL had a mean of 30.37 with a standard deviation of 7.99, JS had a mean of 12.98 with a standard deviation of 4.62, and OC had a mean of 11.97 with a standard deviation of 4.12, as displayed in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Descriptive stats

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation
TFL	24.12	7.88
TSL	30.37	7.99
JS	12.98	4.62
OC	11.97	4.12

Reliability

The internal consistency of all the adopted constructs, as shown in **Table 5**, was found to exceed the acceptable threshold. According to Sharma [53], a good standard for the Cronbach alpha coefficient falls within the range of 0.8 to 0.9, which was met by all constructs in this study.

Table 5. Reliability analysis

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach alpha
Transformational leadership	07	0.86
Transactional leadership	09	0.88
Job satisfaction	04	0.82
Organizational commitment	04	0.83

The proposed model was evaluated using structural equation modeling (SEM) with Amos software. Even though the four latent variables and their indicators were fully derived from prior research, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted for each variable to ensure the model's fit. The results of this analysis are presented in **Table 6**.

Confirmatory factor analysis

As shown in **Table 6**, all the constructs met the necessary criteria for their respective model fit indices.

Table 6. CFA of the individual construct

Categories	Absolute	Relative			Parsimonious		Absolute	
	χ^2/df	CFI	NFI	IFI	PNFI	PCFI	GFI	AGFI
Criteria	< 5.0	> 9.0	> 0.9	> 0.95	> 0.50	> 0.50	> 0.90	> 0.90
TFL	5.32	0.96	0.95	0.96	0.64	0.64	0.93	0.86
TSL	8.6	0.87	0.85	0.87	0.61	0.62	0.86	0.75
JS	3.25	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.33	0.33	0.98	0.94
OC	0.96	1.00	0.99	1.00	0.33	0.33	0.99	0.98

Structural equation model

The model included two exogenous variables (Figure 2). One endogenous variable, organizational commitment, was represented by four indicators. Additionally, job satisfaction served as the mediating variable in the model.

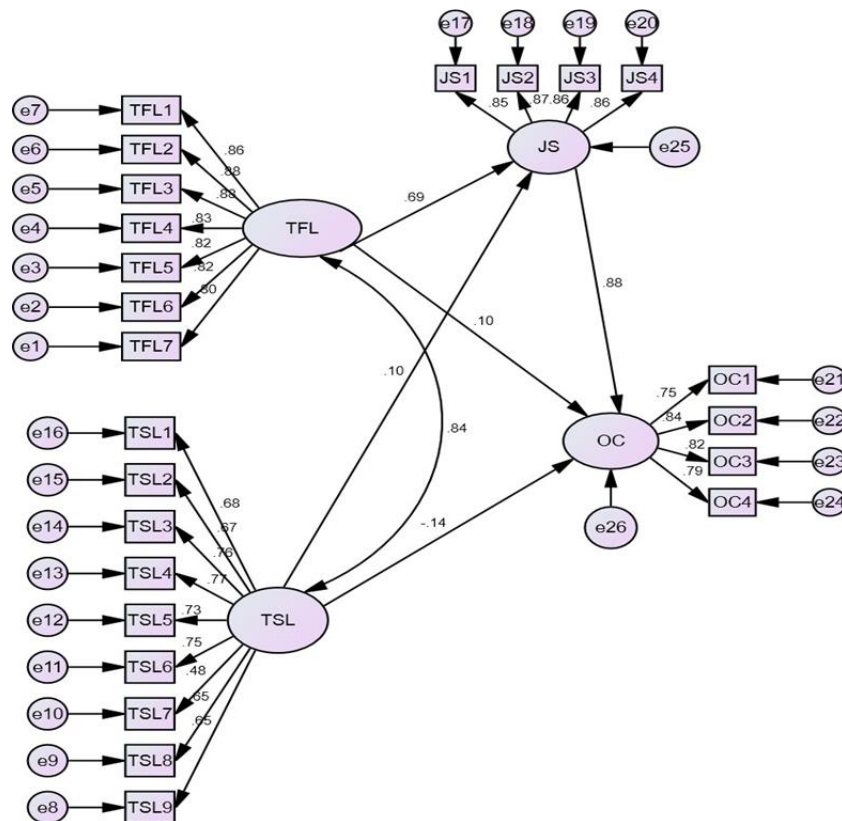


Figure 2. Transformational leadership is measured by seven indicators, and transactional leadership is assessed through nine indicators.

Model fitness

The summary of model fitness, presented in Table 7, demonstrated that the model met the relative criteria with CFI, NFI, and IFI all exceeding 0.9. It also surpassed the parsimonious fitness standards, with PNFI and PCFI both significantly above 0.50. Additionally, the model approached the absolute criteria, with GFI and AGFI values of 0.86 and 0.83, respectively.

Table 7. Model fitness summary

Categories	Absolute	Relative			Parsimonious		Absolute	
Fit Indices	χ^2/df	CFI	NFI	IFI	PNFI	PCFI	GFI	AGFI
Criteria	< 5.0	> 9.0	> 0.9	> 0.95	> 0.50	> 0.50	> 0.90	> 0.90
	2.26	0.94	0.90	0.94	0.80	0.84	0.86	0.83

Hypothesized relationships

The findings presented in Table 8 revealed that, when tested without a mediator, women’s transformational leadership had a significant positive impact on organizational commitment, with a P value of 0.000, which is well below the threshold for significance. The standardized regression coefficient of 0.28 indicated that a 1 percent increase in TFL would result in a 28% increase in organizational commitment. This was accompanied by a standard error of 0.23 and a CR value of 5.231.

Table 8. Effects without mediator

Path coefficients		SRW*	SE	CR	P	
Women transformational leadership	→	Organizational commitment	0.28	0.23	5.231	0.000
Women transactional leadership	→	Organizational commitment	-0.147	0.092	-1.586	0.113

*Standardized regression weight

No direct effect was observed when women's transactional leadership was tested without a mediator on organizational commitment, as the P value was 0.88, which is above the threshold for significance. The standardized regression weight for this relationship was -0.004.

Table 9 presents the mediation results. When job satisfaction was introduced as a mediator, the analysis revealed that job satisfaction fully mediated the relationship between women's transformational leadership and organizational commitment. The total effect was calculated to be 0.288, with a direct effect of -0.02 and an insignificant P value of 0.71. However, the indirect effect was 0.30, with a significant P value of 0.000. This indicates that the entire effect of women's transformational leadership on organizational commitment was mediated through job satisfaction.

Table 9. Mediating effects

Path coefficients		SRW*	SE	CR	P			
Women transformational leadership	→	Organizational commitment	-0.02	0.109	6.936	0.71		
Women transformational leadership	→	Job satisfaction	→	Organizational commitment	0.301	0.125	1.041	0.***

*Standardized regression weight

Women's transformational leadership

The direct influence of transformational leadership on organizational commitment was not observed. However, when job satisfaction resulted from transformational leadership, it eventually contributed to organizational commitment. This implies that when women lead with a transformational style, their initial focus is on fostering job satisfaction in their followers, which in turn leads to enhanced organizational commitment. This is consistent with prior studies that have shown transformational leadership directly impacts organizational commitment [36]. Additionally, transformational leadership has been found to improve follower productivity and, through other mediating factors, contribute to organizational commitment [31]. Supporting the findings of this study, earlier research also highlighted the mediating role of job satisfaction between transformational leadership and organizational commitment [54]. This study further emphasized the complete mediation of job satisfaction, focusing particularly on women leaders and their followers. Other variables, such as work environment [55] and perceived organizational politics [56], were also identified as mediators, and the current study's positive finding on the effect of transformational leadership on job satisfaction aligns with previous research [37, 57].

Women's transactional leadership

Transactional leadership by women did not produce a direct effect on organizational commitment, nor did it significantly influence job satisfaction. This suggests that transactional leadership failed to have an indirect effect on organizational commitment. In cases where women leaders applied a transactional leadership style, based on rewards and punishments, they did not significantly influence organizational commitment or job satisfaction. A contrasting study conducted in Pakistan found that transactional leadership had a stronger impact on job satisfaction compared to transformational leadership [58]. The difference can likely be attributed to gender differences in leadership roles. Furthermore, other areas, such as knowledge sharing [59] and job success [60], were found to be more positively affected by transactional leadership than by transformational leadership.

Conclusion

The exploration of leadership has evolved through various traits, behaviors, and situational theories, encompassing a wide range of approaches and styles. Among the many leadership styles, transformational and transactional leadership have received extensive research. Leaders typically adopt either a reward-punishment approach or aim to foster positive change in their followers. The influence of these two leadership styles has been evaluated across numerous organizational outcomes, including job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The findings consistently show that transformational leadership tends to have a stronger effect on both job satisfaction and organizational commitment when compared to transactional leadership. While few studies have considered gender diversity in examining these relationships, this research focused on women academicians in Pakistan, considering them as leaders and gathering data from their followers. The results revealed that while there was no direct impact of transformational leadership on organizational commitment, a significant indirect effect existed, with job satisfaction serving as a mediating factor. Additionally, the research showed that transactional leadership did not have either a direct or indirect impact on organizational commitment, as job satisfaction did not mediate the relationship between these two variables.

Implication

This study holds significant implications, as it provides valuable insights into leadership dynamics from a gender diversity perspective. By contributing to existing literature, it opens the door for further exploration of additional variables concerning women's leadership styles. It offers practical guidance for current and aspiring women leaders, particularly in Pakistan, helping them better understand the needs of their followers. Women leaders who aim to foster job satisfaction and organizational commitment should focus on adopting a transformational leadership style. Conversely, women leaders who identify with transactional leadership may find it challenging to influence job satisfaction or organizational commitment, according to the findings of this study. This research also serves to support local findings on women in leadership, offering valuable recommendations to organizations and leadership development trainers in grooming women leaders based on the study's results. Furthermore, given the reputation of academicians as pioneers of creativity, the study highlights that when led by women, their commitment and satisfaction with their field are deeply influenced by the leadership style they experience. Therefore, this research provides clear and specific guidance for women academicians in Pakistan.

Limitation and future recommendations

This study was confined to the education sector and focused on academicians within that domain. Future research should expand the conceptual model to include gender diversity considerations in other industries. Additionally, as this study only examined job satisfaction as a mediating factor, further research could explore the roles of other mediators, such as knowledge sharing, job success, and objective performance, in these leadership dynamics.

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