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## Mapping the Foundations of Organizational Commitment: A Systematic Review of Theories, Antecedents, and Leadership Influences

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### Abstract

This study presents a systematic review of literature exploring how organizational commitment (OC) is influenced by trust and leadership, with a focus on the theoretical frameworks that explain these relationships. Although OC has been widely studied, empirical evidence clarifying its antecedents and conceptual foundations remains limited. To address this gap, this review synthesizes research from multiple regions and evaluates trends over time. The analysis identified ten distinct theoretical approaches underpinning OC, highlighting that 2011 marked the peak in publications on this topic ( $N = 26$ ). Empirical studies predominated, particularly those examining individual behavioral theories within OC models. Among the resources used by researchers, Google Scholar was the most common database, while SCOPUS emerged as the preferred indexing platform. Geographically, the United States contributed the largest number of studies, followed by the United Kingdom and India. By integrating these findings, this review offers both scholars and practitioners a consolidated view of the key factors and theoretical perspectives necessary for advancing research and practice on organizational commitment.

**Keywords:** Organizational commitment, Trust, Leadership

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### Introduction

Organizational Commitment (OC) has been a prominent topic of research for several decades and continues to attract scholarly attention. Over time, both new models and existing frameworks have undergone empirical testing, refinement, and integration with related constructs. Despite numerous studies and reviews, there remains a need to consolidate and update the literature to reflect recent advancements. OC is a multifaceted construct, and its focus varies depending on the context. It can encompass an employee's emotional attachment, identification, and involvement with the organization (Affective Commitment) [1]; the perceived costs associated with leaving the organization (Continuance Commitment) [2]; a sense of moral or ethical obligation to remain (Normative Commitment) [3]; reciprocal expectations between the employee and the organization (Psychological Contract-based Commitment) [4]; or dedication to one's profession (Occupational Commitment) [5]. These variations illustrate the complexity of OC and underscore the importance of clearly defining the scope, context, and target population in research.

Three constructs—organizational commitment, trust, and leadership—play a central role in shaping organizational dynamics and effectiveness [6-8]. Extensive research has demonstrated that these constructs contribute to fostering a positive work environment and enhancing organizational performance. Recognizing their interconnections is crucial for understanding the broader dynamics of organizational behavior [9]. High employee commitment is associated with reduced turnover, making it



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imperative for organizations to implement strategies and programs that sustain commitment over time [10]. A holistic approach that integrates OC, trust, and leadership is therefore essential.

Organizational commitment reflects employees' psychological attachment and loyalty to their organization, encompassing their acceptance of organizational goals and willingness to exert effort to achieve them [11, 12]. Highly committed employees tend to exhibit greater job satisfaction, engagement, and performance, which in turn drives better organizational outcomes [13]. Trust is equally fundamental, involving confidence that others will act reliably and ethically, promoting cooperation, open communication, and knowledge sharing [14, 15]. Leadership shapes organizational culture and can influence both trust and commitment. Some studies highlight trust as a mediator in the leadership-OC relationship [16], while others suggest that organizational culture itself may serve as a mediator [17].

Affective commitment is closely linked to social support and self-regulation, as employees in psychologically safe environments benefit from relational resources that enhance their emotional engagement [18]. Leaders play a pivotal role in fostering this trust and commitment by demonstrating integrity, competence, and supportive behaviors [19, 20]. Employees' trust in their leaders enhances satisfaction, loyalty, and overall organizational commitment [21]. Accordingly, supervisors must receive training to cultivate supportive relationships, while employees must also recognize their commitment to immediate leaders, who act as intermediaries between staff and the broader organization [22, 23].

Despite the extensive research on OC, trust, and leadership individually, there remains a pressing need to examine their interrelationships comprehensively. This systematic literature review aims to synthesize empirical and theoretical evidence across disciplines to elucidate the complex interactions among these constructs, identify the theories and variables associated with them, highlight gaps in the literature, and provide insights for fostering a positive organizational climate.

## Theories Underpinning Organizational Commitment

Several theoretical frameworks have been developed to explain the mechanisms of OC and its links to trust and leadership, reflecting how employees perceive, internalize, and act upon their attachment to organizational goals and values. Across service and manufacturing sectors, ten primary theories have emerged in the literature.

### *Emotional labor theory*

Emotional Labor Theory (ELT), initially introduced by Hochschild [24, 25], conceptualizes the regulation of one's emotions to meet occupational and organizational expectations. It involves managing feelings to produce a publicly observable emotional display, which has an exchange value when performed for a wage [25]. Ashforth and Humphrey [26] refined this definition, emphasizing the behavioral display of emotions rather than mere internal feelings. ELT is particularly relevant to service roles, where employees must regulate emotions, maintain a positive demeanor, and manage interactions with clients effectively [27].

According to this theory, OC is influenced by how well employees cope with the emotional demands of their work [28, 29]. Organizations that provide support, such as training or supervisory guidance, help employees manage these demands, fostering commitment. Conversely, excessive emotional labor without adequate support can lead to burnout and decreased organizational attachment [30]. ELT thus provides an important psychological framework for understanding the emotional drivers of employee commitment, particularly in service-oriented industries.

### *Equity theory*

Equity Theory (EQT), developed by J. Stacey Adams in the 1960s, posits that employees are motivated by perceptions of fairness in the allocation of inputs and outputs within the workplace [31]. The theory emphasizes that individuals strive to maintain equity by comparing their contributions—such as effort, skills, and time—with the rewards or outcomes they receive, including recognition, pay, or promotions, against those of their peers [32, 33]. When employees perceive fairness in the workplace, they are more likely to trust their organization and leaders, which in turn strengthens their organizational commitment [34, 35]. EQT highlights that perceptions of equity in reward distribution, procedural fairness, and psychological contracts are crucial determinants of OC. Employees who feel treated fairly tend to develop trust, engagement, and loyalty toward the organization, thereby enhancing their commitment.

### *Expectancy theory*

Expectancy Theory (EXT), introduced by Vroom [36], explains that employees' commitment to an organization is influenced by their expectations regarding the connection between their efforts and the outcomes they receive [37, 38]. According to this framework, employees are motivated to exert effort when they believe it will lead to desirable results, such as career growth, skill development, or recognition [39, 40]. The theory consists of three components: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Expectancy refers to the belief that one's effort will achieve a particular performance level [39]. Instrumentality represents the perception that performance will lead to rewards [41], and valence reflects the importance assigned to the expected

outcomes [42]. In the context of OC, when employees trust that their contributions are recognized and rewarded, and when the outcomes are personally meaningful, their commitment to the organization increases [43].

### *Identity theory*

Identity Theory (IDT) suggests that individuals derive a sense of self and personal identity through their group memberships, including affiliation with an organization [44]. Individuals possess multiple identities shaped by their social roles, which influence their behaviors and attitudes. Within organizations, employees' identification with the company can have significant implications for their performance and psychological well-being [45-47]. IDT asserts that employees who perceive the organization as central to their self-concept are more likely to develop a strong sense of OC [48, 49]. Organizational identity thus fosters loyalty, engagement, and long-term attachment.

### *Job embeddedness theory*

Job Embeddedness Theory (JET), introduced by Mitchell *et al.* (2001), highlights the factors that influence employee retention beyond job satisfaction or commitment alone. It posits that employees remain with an organization due to a combination of links, fit, and sacrifice [50, 51]. Links refer to formal and informal connections within the organization, fit denotes the alignment between an employee's values and the organizational culture, and sacrifice captures the perceived costs of leaving [52]. Employees who are highly embedded tend to have stronger social and professional networks, experience a better fit with organizational values, and perceive substantial costs if they exit, resulting in greater commitment and lower turnover [53-56]. JET emphasizes the social, cultural, and practical dimensions that anchor employees within organizations, demonstrating a clear link between embeddedness and organizational commitment.

### *Leader-member exchange theory*

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory emphasizes that the interactions between supervisors and employees create differentiated relationships within the workplace [57, 58]. Employees who experience strong, positive relationships with their leaders—often called in-group members—tend to have clearer roles, higher job satisfaction, and stronger identification with their organization. These high-quality exchanges cultivate trust, respect, and access to organizational resources, which, in turn, foster loyalty and commitment. The theory underscores that the quality of leader-employee relationships can directly influence organizational commitment, as employees feel valued and supported when leaders actively engage in meaningful exchanges [59, 60].

### *Social exchange theory*

Social Exchange Theory (SET) posits that social relationships are governed by reciprocal exchanges where individuals expect fair returns for their contributions [61, 62]. Within organizations, employees perceive an exchange when they invest effort, time, and skills and receive recognition, rewards, or job security in return. When employees believe their organization meets these implicit expectations, they are more likely to develop a strong attachment and commitment to the organization. Reciprocity plays a central role, as employees respond to perceived fairness and support with loyalty and engagement. Furthermore, consistent positive treatment by the organization fosters trust, which strengthens both affective and normative dimensions of organizational commitment [63, 64].

### *Psychological contract theory*

Psychological Contract Theory (PCT) focuses on unwritten mutual expectations between employees and employers, shaping their professional relationship beyond formal agreements [65, 66]. This “psychological contract” captures what employees believe they owe to the organization and what they should receive in return, encompassing social and relational obligations. When organizations fulfill these implicit promises, employees are more likely to develop loyalty, attachment, and a sense of responsibility toward the organization. Conversely, breaches of the psychological contract can weaken commitment. PCT highlights the importance of perceived fairness, trust, and mutual obligations in fostering organizational commitment and sustaining long-term employee engagement [67, 68].

### *Service-profit chain theory*

The Service-Profit Chain framework, developed by researchers at Harvard Business School, illustrates the interconnected relationship between employee satisfaction and commitment, customer loyalty, and organizational financial performance [69]. The theory asserts that when employees feel engaged and committed, they are more likely to deliver high-quality services, which enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty [70]. Consequently, satisfied customers contribute to improved profitability and business success. The model highlights a sequential link: internal organizational factors such as employee engagement, productivity, and commitment influence customer experiences, which in turn affect revenue and profitability [71]. This

framework has been widely applied across service industries, emphasizing the strategic importance of employee engagement, customer-focused operations, and long-term relational strategies for sustainable success [72, 73].

### *Role theory*

Role Theory, originating from early sociological and psychological studies by scholars such as George Herbert Mead and Ralph Linton, explains behavior expectations associated with specific positions within an organization [74, 75]. In organizational settings, employee commitment is shaped by how individuals perceive their responsibilities and the degree to which they identify with their roles [76]. Employees who recognize the importance of their contributions and feel their roles are acknowledged are more likely to develop loyalty and attachment to their organization. Organizations can enhance this commitment by clearly defining roles, providing development opportunities, and recognizing employee contributions [77]. Role conflicts may arise when employees face contradictory expectations, but successfully navigating these responsibilities can increase job satisfaction and reinforce organizational commitment [78, 79].

### **Keywords and Search Strategy**

The initial phase of the literature review focused on identifying theories that explain the behavioral drivers of organizational commitment (OC). The search string “Organizational commitment AND theories” was employed across multiple electronic databases to identify relevant peer-reviewed studies. The databases examined included Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, SAGE, ScienceDirect, JSTOR, Wiley Online Library, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, EBSCO, SSRN, ERIC, Emerald Insight, and Elsevier ScienceDirect. Indexed sources included SCOPUS, Clarivate Analytics, ProQuest, SAGE, JSTOR, Wiley, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, EBSCO, ERIC, and Emerald Insight.

The review focused on publications from January 1, 1985, to April 2023 to capture trends over time and to include the historical development of OC-related theories. Only articles with full-text access were included. The Service-Profit Chain Theory, originating in the mid-1990s through research by Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser Jr., and Schlesinger, examined how employee satisfaction and engagement influence customer experiences and, ultimately, financial outcomes. Their studies spanned multiple service sectors, including retail, banking, and hospitality, confirming that committed employees contribute significantly to customer loyalty and organizational profitability [72].

Given the diversity of databases, multiple search strategies and strings were employed to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature. Details of search combinations and procedures are provided in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Search strings and Boolean operators.

Concept	Key words and strings	Boolean operator
Organizational commitment with associated concept	[Organizational commitment AND Leadership] [Theory OR Theories OR Model OR Models OR System OR Systems OR Concept OR Concepts]	AND
Organizational commitment with a variable of interest	[Organizational commitment AND Trust] [Leadership AND Trust] [Organizational commitment AND Trust AND Leadership] [Theory OR Theories OR Model OR Models OR System OR Systems OR Concept OR Concepts]	AND, OR

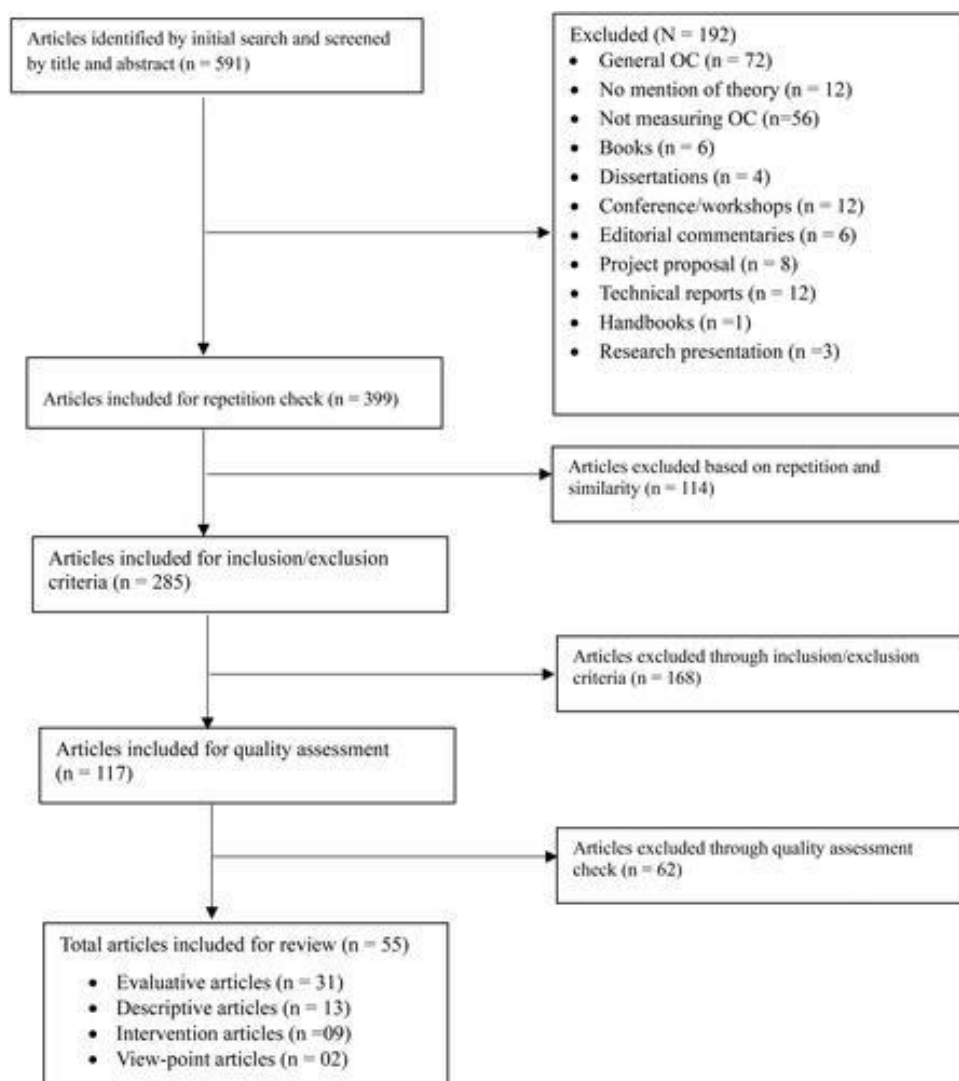
Source: Authors.

Table depicts how the relevant research publications arrived using appropriate keywords and search strategies for the present study.

### *Selecting and assessing the quality of primary studies*

Search strings corresponding to all identified theories were applied, yielding a total of 591 studies. An initial manual screening was conducted based on the relevance of study titles, resulting in the exclusion of 192 studies, including conference papers, workshops, books, editorial reviews, dissertations, and book reviews. This step reduced the pool to 399 studies. Following this, duplicate and overlapping studies across multiple databases (114 in total) were removed, narrowing the selection to 285 articles.

Subsequently, each study underwent a detailed assessment based on its introduction, literature review, results, and conclusions to apply inclusion and exclusion criteria rigorously. This process led to the elimination of 168 studies, leaving 117 studies relevant to organizational commitment (OC) constructs. These studies were then subjected to a quality appraisal, resulting in the exclusion of 62 studies that did not meet predefined quality standards. Ultimately, a final set of 55 high-quality studies was selected for inclusion in this systematic review. The process of study selection is illustrated in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** PRISMA flowchart

The figure above illustrates the flowchart representing the article selection process for this review. The studies included were categorized into four main types. Evaluative articles empirically tested specific theories. Descriptive articles provided original descriptions or extensions of a theory and explicitly addressed the three constructs of interest in this study: organizational commitment, trust, and leadership. Intervention articles examined or proposed theoretical applications aimed at influencing organizational commitment outcomes. Viewpoint articles presented opinion-based analyses of organizational commitment theories while adhering to a transparent methodology encompassing search strategy, inclusion/exclusion criteria, quality assessment, data extraction, data synthesis, and results.

### *Inclusion criteria*

Articles were included if they explicitly addressed research constructs related to organizational commitment using relevant theoretical frameworks; incorporated theories and methods to evaluate or implement interventions targeting organizational commitment; empirically tested theories with a clear description of research design; compared two or more theories; discussed philosophical aspects such as epistemology or ontology; evaluated hypothetical models by linking them to a core framework; or proposed, criticized, or extended existing models or theories to develop contemporary organizational commitment frameworks.

### *Exclusion criteria*

Articles were excluded if they mentioned organizational commitment in the title or abstract but primarily focused on related topics, such as general organizational behavior; provided qualitative historical or contextual discussions of organizational commitment; addressed challenges or issues in its development; performed comparative studies across nations; or fell into categories such as books, conference presentations or posters, editorial commentaries, handbooks, dissertations, non-peer-reviewed publications, non-English articles, research proposals, technical reports, tutorials, or workshop summaries.



### *Quality assessment*

Evaluating study quality in a systematic literature review is inherently challenging and often subject to reviewer discretion due to the absence of standardized criteria. Factors such as research context, design, clarity of research questions, journal impact, precise definitions of key terms, and contribution to knowledge provide a foundation for assessment [80]. This review considered quality definitions specifically relevant to its focus. Articles were rigorously scrutinized through repeated reading and strict application of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Priority was given to studies emphasizing reproducible scientific and philosophical aspects of organizational commitment theories.

### *Data extraction*

Data were systematically extracted using Microsoft Excel to organize key characteristics of each study and facilitate synthesis. Extraction focused on two dimensions: (i) general study characteristics and (ii) classification of studies according to the research framework.

### *Data synthesis procedure*

Data synthesis involved examining extracted outcomes—including study characteristics, theoretical frameworks, research designs, target behaviors, and classification schemes—to draw meaningful conclusions regarding organizational commitment, trust, and leadership.

### *General characteristics of included studies*

This analysis addressed the first three research questions by examining variables such as the country of study, database, journal, theory employed, article type, source type, research design (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods), target behavior, population, sampling methods, and perception measurements. Key reference details, including author, title, and year, were recorded.

### *Classification scheme*

Selected studies were categorized based on research contribution, focus, and type.

### *Contribution type*

Theoretical foundations of organizational commitment were derived from disciplines including sociology, psychology, human resource management, organizational behavior, industrial-organizational psychology, general management, strategic management, and leadership. The studies were grouped into three categories: (i) Theories of Individual Behavior, (ii) Theories of Social Behavior, and (iii) Theories of Technology Behavior.

### *Research focus*

Research focus was categorized to address RQ4. Papers on model development highlighted the need to revise existing theories to better explain how organizational commitment forms among employees. These studies systematically conducted literature reviews, identified research gaps, formulated problems, developed conceptual models, selected research methodologies, collected and analyzed data, refined models, and documented findings. Model testing studies empirically examined theoretical models within specific organizational contexts, such as service or manufacturing sectors. Testing involved hypothesis development, research design, data collection and analysis, result interpretation, and in some cases, replication, verification, and model refinement.

### *Model advancement*

Studies categorized under model advancement primarily aimed to contribute to the development of organizational commitment (OC) frameworks by introducing new variables, concepts, or theoretical insights, or by extending existing theories. Researchers employed a variety of approaches to achieve this, including empirical investigations, mathematical modeling, and expanding conceptual frameworks through critical analysis of assumptions, logical consistency, and internal coherence. Additional strategies involved synthesizing existing knowledge, enhancing predictive capabilities, engaging in scholarly discourse with peers to exchange ideas and receive constructive feedback, and collaborating with other researchers to collectively advance theoretical models. Furthermore, technological and methodological innovations provided new tools for data collection, measurement, and analysis. Some studies also addressed philosophical and epistemological aspects, debating the nature of scientific inquiry, criteria for theory evaluation, and foundational assumptions underlying models and theories.

### *Model comparison*

Research focused on model comparison evaluated two or more OC models across multiple dimensions, including conceptual frameworks, empirical support, predictive accuracy, methodological rigor, scope coverage, strengths and weaknesses, evolutionary development, and interdisciplinary relevance. Since no single comparison method can yield definitive conclusions, researchers tailored their approaches to the context and specific research questions. Common methods employed included assessing parsimony, coherence, internal consistency, falsifiability, scope and generality, convergence of evidence, consensus through peer review, comparative advantages, and historical context. These strategies allowed scholars to gain nuanced insights into the relative effectiveness and applicability of different OC models.

### Research type

Seven distinct types of research were identified among the reviewed publications, as summarized in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Research type and description

Research type	Description
1. Grounded theory	Studies employing grounded theory utilized an iterative methodology, wherein researchers constructed theories or concepts pertaining to OC through the examination of data gathered via interviews, observations, and/or documents. These works emphasized deriving theories straight from the data, facilitating the emergence of novel insights and perspectives.
2. Comparative study	These studies conducted a structured analysis and comparison of two or more entities, phenomena, variables, or datasets associated with OC, aiming to uncover similarities, differences, patterns, relationships, or trends among them.
3. Case study	These works performed a thorough investigation of OC within a particular instance, such as an individual, group, organization, or community. They incorporated diverse data sources, including interviews, observations, and documents, to deliver a detailed and holistic comprehension of the case.
4. Document analysis	These studies analyzed different types of textual or visual materials linked to OC, including written documents, organizational records, public archives, or digital content.
5. Descriptive research	This research category sought to characterize and record the traits, behaviors, or phenomena of a specific population in relation to OC.
6. Analytical research	Publications in this group applied a structured and rigorous approach to explore and elucidate intricate phenomena by reviewing and interpreting pre-existing data or information connected to OC.
7. Empirical research	These studies depended on the systematic collection and analysis of empirical evidence to address research questions, evaluate hypotheses, or examine phenomena related to OC with precision and thoroughness.

Source: Authors.

Table represents an brief description about the research approaches used in the identified research publication.

### Data synthesis

In the context of a systematic literature review (SLR), data synthesis involves the systematic analysis and integration of findings from multiple studies to generate new insights or draw overarching conclusions. This process entails extracting relevant information, organizing it coherently, and combining results from the selected studies to address the review's research questions or objectives.

The primary purpose of data synthesis is to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based summary of the accumulated research. It allows for the identification of knowledge gaps, resolution of conflicting results, recognition of limitations within the existing literature, and guidance for future research directions or practical applications. By integrating data across studies, researchers can develop a more nuanced understanding of a topic, theory, or phenomenon, grounded in the collective empirical evidence. The following methodological steps facilitated the achievement of these data synthesis objectives.

### Results of Theory Identification and Frequency of Use

Analysis of the reviewed articles revealed ten distinct theories related to organizational commitment (OC), each applied in diverse contexts (**Table 3**). These contexts included disciplinary, historical, cultural, social, practical, interdisciplinary, and global settings. It was observed that certain contexts overlapped, such as interdisciplinary and global applications, highlighting the multifaceted nature of OC research across different theoretical and practical domains.

**Table 3.** Frequency of occurrence of theories in publications.

Theory	Number of articles	Contribution in percentage
1. Social exchange theory	8	15
2. Psychological contract theory	8	15
3. Identity theory	7	13
4. Leader-member exchange theory	7	13
5. Emotional labor theory	6	11

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6. Equity theory	6	11
7. Expectancy theory	4	7
8. Job embeddedness theory	3	5
9. Role theory	3	5
10. Service-profit chain theory	3	5
Total	55	100

Source: Authors.

Table highlights the theories used by different research studies and their contributions to the study.

## Contextual Application of Theories

In the disciplinary context, theories are examined within the specific academic field in which they were developed and applied. Several studies in this review focused on advancing organizational commitment (OC) theory through processes that included identifying theoretical gaps, conceptualizing propositions, and empirically validating hypotheses. This process often contributed to refining existing theories or developing new ones. Notably, Social Exchange Theory, Expectancy Theory, and Psychological Contract Theory were frequently applied within this disciplinary framework.

The historical context considers the influence of temporal and historical events on theory development. For example, Social Exchange Theory, originally proposed by George Homans in the 1950s, exemplifies how historical factors shape the conceptual underpinnings of OC research. These historically grounded theories have had a lasting impact on the theoretical development of OC.

Cultural context pertains to how individual values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors shape organizational commitment. Recognizing cultural nuances is essential because no two cultures are identical. Research in this domain demonstrates that understanding cultural dimensions helps organizations develop strategies that align with employees' expectations and strengthen OC across diverse cultural settings. Within this SLR, Leader-Member Exchange Theory was the most prominent in addressing cultural influences on commitment.

Social context refers to the role of social interactions and relationships within the workplace in influencing employees' commitment. This context examines patterns of support, collaboration, and workplace dynamics that affect OC. Theories such as Social Exchange Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Leader-Member Exchange Theory emerged as key frameworks in analyzing social factors contributing to employee commitment.

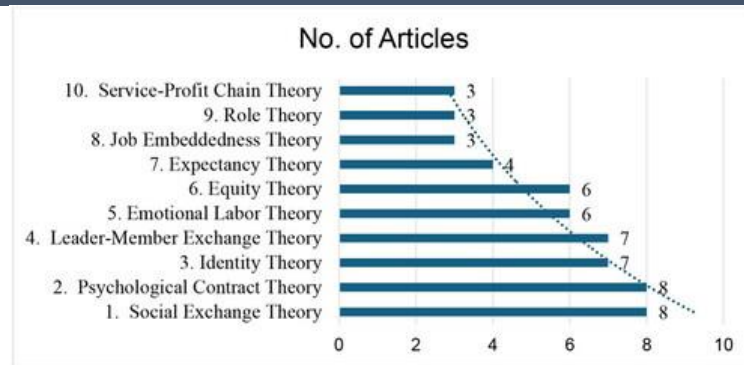
The practical context encompasses the direct applications of OC theories in organizational settings. The primary objective in this context is enhancing employee retention and reducing turnover. By identifying the determinants of commitment, organizations can develop strategies to improve employee satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty. Committed employees are more likely to deliver high-quality service, fostering positive customer experiences, satisfaction, and loyalty. Consequently, OC theories are crucial for achieving organizational success across multiple practical dimensions.

The interdisciplinary context emphasizes a holistic understanding of OC by integrating insights from multiple academic disciplines, such as marketing, human resources, operations management, social psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior. Theories applied in this context—including Service-Profit Chain Theory, Emotional Labor Theory, Job Embeddedness Theory, Leader-Member Exchange Theory, and Psychological Contract Theory—reflect the multifaceted nature of OC and highlight the benefits of cross-disciplinary approaches for theory development and practical interventions.

Global context is particularly relevant in multinational corporations (MNCs), where employees may work as expatriates or within cross-cultural teams. Studies in this domain examine how differences in cultural values, norms, and beliefs influence employees' commitment, demonstrating the importance of understanding OC in a globalized workforce.

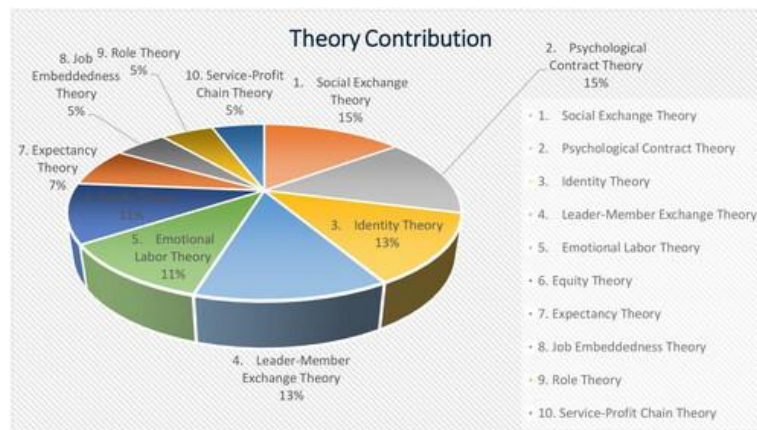
Although the selected studies addressed these diverse contexts, the 55 papers included in this review were ultimately classified according to contribution type, research focus, and research methodology to inform future research directions in OC. Analysis of theory usage across these publications (**Table 3**) revealed that six theories dominated the literature. Social Exchange Theory and Psychological Contract Theory appeared most frequently (15% each), followed by Identity Theory and Leader-Member Exchange Theory (13% each), and Emotional Labor Theory and Equity Theory (11% each), collectively representing 78% of the theoretical applications identified (**Figures 2 and 3**).





**Figure 2.** Frequency of theories in publication

The above figure highlights the use of the use of theories in different studies.



**Figure 3.** Share of theories in publications

Figure depicts the contribution of theories used in the study included for the review.

## Results and Analysis of the Publications

Among the 55 studies reviewed, qualitative approaches were most commonly employed ( $N = 28$ ; 51%), followed by quantitative methods ( $N = 23$ ; 42%), and mixed-methods approaches ( $N = 4$ ; 7%) (**Figure 1**). The qualitative studies primarily relied on structured schedules (15 publications) and in-depth interviews (7 publications), with the remainder using focus group interviews. Purposive sampling was the predominant technique for qualitative data collection.

For the quantitative studies, nine employed exploratory factor analysis, eight utilized confirmatory factor analysis, and the remaining relied on descriptive statistical techniques. Regarding sampling approaches in quantitative research, ten studies applied probability sampling, eight used non-probability sampling—primarily convenience sampling—and several did not specify their sampling methods. Surveys and questionnaires were the main tools for data collection in these quantitative designs.

The target populations of the reviewed studies varied. Most research focused on employees ( $N = 22$ ; 41%), followed by organizations ( $N = 13$ ; 24%), teams or work units ( $N = 7$ ; 13%), industries or sectors ( $N = 7$ ; 12%), cross-cultural work groups ( $N = 4$ ; 8%), and cross-national comparisons ( $N = 2$ ; 3%) (**Table 4**). Overall, this indicates that approximately 78% of the studies concentrated on employees, organizations, or teams/work units, highlighting the primary focus of OC research on individual and group-level organizational dynamics.

**Table 4.** Research design characteristics of studies.

Research design characteristic	Specification	Number of articles	Contribution
1. Research methods ( $N = 55$ )	1. Quantitative	23	42%
	2. Qualitative	28	51%
	3. Mixed methods	04	7%
2. Factor analysis ( $N = 23$ )	1. Exploratory factor analysis	9	41%
	2. Confirmatory factor analysis	8	34%
	3. Not mentioned	6	25%
	1. Probability sampling	10	44%

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3. Sampling techniques (N = 23)	2. Non-probability sampling	8	34%
	3. Not mentioned	5	22%
	1. Employees	22	41%
4. Target population (N = 55)	2. Organizations	13	24%
	3. Teams or work-units	7	13%
	4. Industries or sectors	7	12%
	4. Cross-cultural workgroups	4	8%
	5. Cross-national comparisons	2	3%

Source: Authors.

The table briefly describes the previous study's characteristics and their contribution for the present study.

## Results of the Classification Scheme

The classification framework for this systematic literature review, developed in response to research question three, organizes studies according to their contribution type, research focus, and methodological approach. The 55 selected studies and their associated OC theories were examined across seven analytical contexts: disciplinary, historical, cultural, social, practical, interdisciplinary, and global. These contexts were then linked to three overarching theoretical categories: individual behavior, social behavior, and technology-related behavior.

Theories such as Expectancy Theory (EXT), Psychological Contract Theory (PCT), Equity Theory (EQT), and Identity Theory (IDT) were classified as individual behavior theories, as they primarily explain personal attitudes and motivations influencing organizational commitment. Social behavior theories, including Social Exchange Theory (SET), Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMT), and EQT, emphasize interactions and relational dynamics between employees and organizational actors. The influence of technology on organizational commitment was explored through multiple theories (SET, EXT, PCT, EQT, and LMT), reflecting how organizational systems and tools shape employee behavior. The Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework was also highlighted as an emerging approach for understanding the interplay of technology and organizational behavior in shaping commitment.

In terms of contribution, 26 studies focused on individual behavior, 21 on social behavior, and eight examined technology-related aspects. Regarding research focus, 23 studies addressed model development, 14 tested theoretical models empirically, four advanced or extended models with new variables or frameworks, and 14 undertook comparative analyses of existing models.

With respect to research design, the included studies employed diverse methodologies: Grounded Theory (N=11), comparative studies (N=10), case studies (N = 8), document analysis (N=4), empirical research (N=13), descriptive studies (N=5), and analytical research (N=4) (**Figure 4**). Overall, this classification demonstrates the varied theoretical, methodological, and contextual perspectives employed in OC research and provides a structured overview for future studies to build upon.

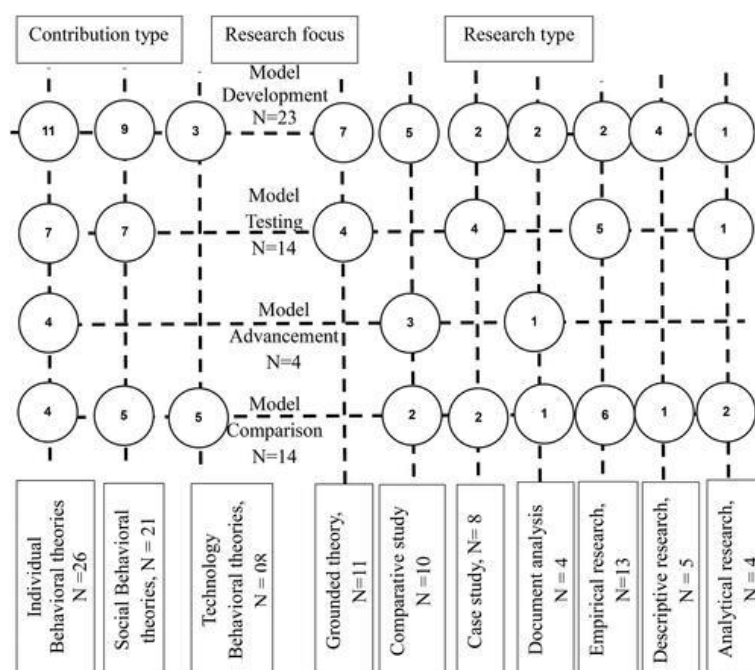
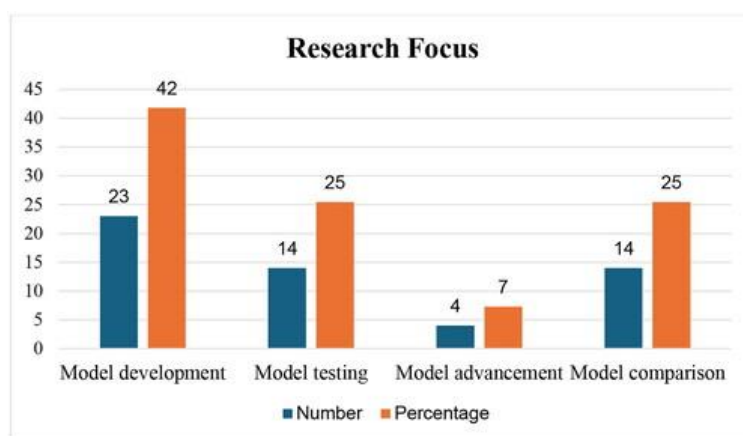


Figure 4. Research focus map

Figure depicts the research focus map, which highlights the segregation of studies based on contribution type, research focus, and research type.

### *Classification based on theoretical models*

The classification of theoretical models is shown in **Figure 4** based on different research criteria. Also, the distribution of studies based on research focus is shown in **Figure 5**.



**Figure 5.** Distribution of studies based on research focus

## **Analysis of Research Focus and Theory Application**

The reviewed studies were organized according to four main research foci: developing new models, empirically testing existing models, advancing models through new insights, and comparing multiple models.

### *Developing models*

Among the 23 studies focusing on model development, the majority (11) explored individual behavioral theories, nine addressed social behavior theories, and three investigated technology-related behavior theories. These studies employed various research designs, with grounded theory appearing most frequently (seven studies), while analytical approaches were less common (one study).

### *Empirical model testing*

Of the 14 studies that concentrated on model testing, an equal number (seven each) applied individual and social behavior theories, with none based on technology behavior theories. Research designs were diverse: four studies used either grounded theory or case studies, five conducted empirical analyses, and one adopted an analytical approach.

### *Advancing models*

Four studies were identified as advancing existing models, all of which drew on individual behavioral theories. Most of these contributions (three studies) were comparative analyses, and one involved document analysis.

### *Comparing models*

Within the 14 studies focusing on model comparison, four examined individual behavior theories, five explored social behavior theories, and five involved technology behavior theories. The methodological approaches varied, with empirical research being the most common (six studies) and document analysis or analytical research the least represented (four studies).

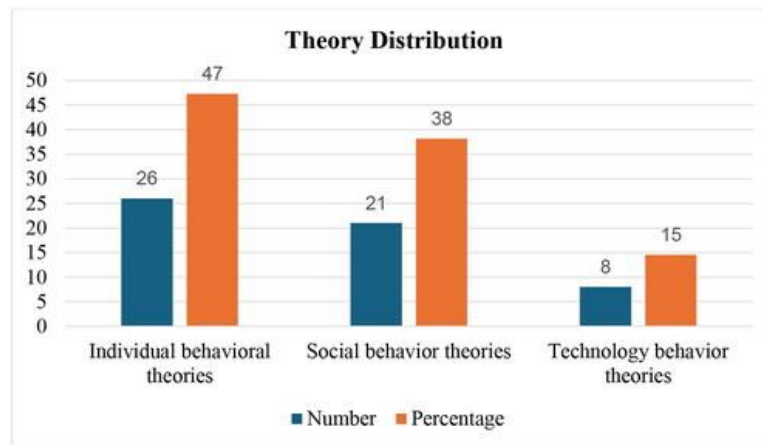
### *Contextual classification of theories*

The literature was further classified into seven contexts: disciplinary, historical, cultural, social, practical, interdisciplinary, and global. These contexts were linked to three overarching theoretical categories: individual behavior, social behavior, and technology behavior.

### *Individual behavior theories*

Theories centered on individual behavior emerged as the most frequently studied category, with 26 relevant publications. Of these, 11 focused on developing models, seven on testing them, and four each on advancing and comparing models. This

distribution highlights that research on advancing and comparing individual behavior-based models remains relatively limited, suggesting opportunities for further exploration.



**Figure 6.** Distribution of theories in publication

The distribution of theories across the three major categories—individual behavioral, social behavioral, and technology behavioral—was analyzed in the reviewed studies.

#### *Social behavior theories*

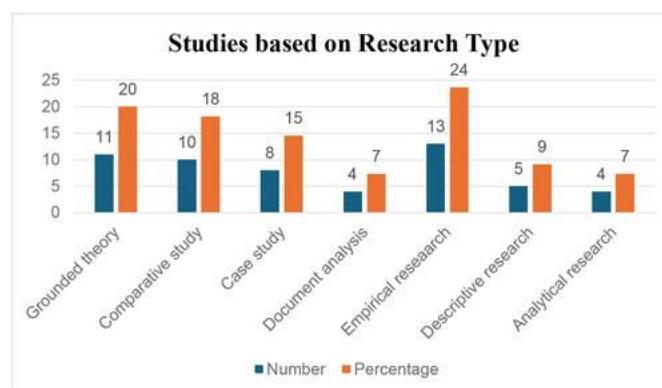
Twenty-one publications fell under the social behavior category. Among these, nine focused on model development, seven addressed model testing, and five investigated model comparison. Notably, no studies were identified that aimed at advancing models within this category. This absence indicates a potential area for future research to explore how social behavior theories can be further developed or refined in the context of organizational commitment.

#### *Technology behavior theories*

Technology-related behavior theories were the least represented, with only eight publications. Of these, three focused on model development, and five examined model comparison. There were no studies addressing model testing or model advancement within this category, highlighting a clear gap in the literature and an opportunity for future investigation into how technology influences organizational commitment.

#### *Classification by research type*

The literature encompassed seven distinct research types. Among them, grounded theory was used in 11 studies, distributed as seven in model development and four in model testing. Grounded theory is particularly valuable when creating new conceptual models to explain organizational phenomena. Over time, it can also support empirical testing by informing hypothesis formulation. Despite its application in these areas, grounded theory remains underutilized in studies focusing on model advancement and comparison, suggesting further potential for its application in organizational commitment research.



**Figure 7.** Distribution of studies by research type

The figure illustrates the distribution of studies according to the research type employed. Comparative studies were represented in ten publications among the 55 studies reviewed, with five focusing on model development, three examining model advancement, and two analyzing model comparison. Notably, none of the comparative studies addressed model testing,

revealing a gap and an opportunity for further investigation in this area of organizational commitment research. Case studies appeared in eight publications, with two addressing model development, four focused on model testing, and two investigating model comparison. However, none of the case studies explored model advancement, suggesting potential for further research using this method. Document analysis was applied in four studies, with two papers examining model development, one addressing model advancement, and one focusing on model comparison. No studies using document analysis targeted model testing, indicating that this method may be less suited for testing models. Empirical research was the most frequently employed methodology, appearing in 13 studies, with two focusing on model development, five on model testing, and six on model comparison. Despite its prevalence, no empirical studies examined model advancement, highlighting an area for additional exploration. Descriptive research appeared in five studies, with four addressing model development and one focusing on model comparison. While descriptive methods were not used for model testing, they could be leveraged in future studies for advancing models. Analytical research was employed in four studies, with one each addressing model development and model testing and two focusing on model comparison, revealing an underexplored opportunity to apply analytical approaches for model advancement in organizational commitment research.

Among the ten theories analyzed, individual behavior theories were most prominent, appearing in 26 studies (47 percent), followed by social behavior theories in 21 studies (38 percent) and technology behavior theories in eight studies (15 percent). Individual behavior theories primarily aim to understand employee behavior across different organizational contexts, drawing insights from psychology, sociology, and economics. Social behavior theories focus on interpersonal interactions and social influences on behavior, incorporating perspectives from psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Technology behavior theories, a more recent addition, investigate how individuals and organizations interact with technology and how technology affects behavior, drawing on information systems, psychology, and sociology.

The Research Focus Map indicates that model development was the dominant research focus within individual behavior theories, with grounded theory being the most frequently applied method. Conversely, there were no studies on model testing or model advancement within technology behavior theories, and model advancement within social behavior theories was also absent. Grounded theory was not applied to model advancement or comparison, and other research methods, such as case study, empirical, descriptive, and analytical research, were underutilized in model advancement. Model testing was largely absent in comparative studies, document analysis, and descriptive research, highlighting gaps in methodological coverage.

Several research gaps emerge from this analysis. In the area of technology behavior, there is a need for research on model testing and advancement, with the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework being particularly underdeveloped and requiring empirical validation. Other theories, including SET, EXT, PCT, EQT, and LXT, also intersect with technology behavior, offering additional opportunities for research. In social behavior theories, model advancement remains underexplored, and further development of SET, LXT, and EQT could deepen understanding of social factors influencing organizational commitment. Grounded theory has been underutilized for model advancement and comparison, yet it offers a systematic approach to identify patterns, refine existing models, and generate new theoretical insights. Furthermore, model advancement has been rarely explored using case study, empirical, descriptive, or analytical methods, indicating an opportunity to expand the theoretical understanding of organizational commitment. Model testing also remains underrepresented in comparative studies, document analysis, and descriptive research, suggesting that further work in these areas could enhance knowledge by evaluating existing models, examining documentation, and providing descriptive evidence of organizational commitment frameworks.

The discussion of data extraction and synthesis aims to contextualize the research on organizational commitment (OC) and highlight insights drawn from the reviewed studies. An examination of OC research publications spanning from 1985 to 2023 reveals a clear upward trend in scholarly activity, with a notable peak in 2011 when 26 studies specifically addressed the roles of trust and leadership in shaping employee commitment. This heightened research interest during the early 21st century can be linked to the digital revolution and its substantial influence on workplace dynamics and organizational practices. Researchers have consistently noted that evolving workforce dynamics, increasing emphasis on employee engagement, sophisticated talent management strategies, and pressures to enhance organizational performance contributed to this surge in OC-related studies, particularly in response to intensified global competition [80-83]. Within this context, Google Scholar emerged as the primary database for locating OC-related publications, whereas SCOPUS was the dominant indexing source due to its extensive coverage, reliable citation tracking, advanced search capabilities, and global reach. In terms of geographic contributions, the United States, the United Kingdom, and India were the most prolific, a trend explained by factors such as research funding availability, high-caliber academic institutions, a robust publication culture, extensive networking opportunities, and access to collaborative research environments. Most studies focused on employees, reflecting the logical assumption that organizational commitment is best examined at the individual level, where attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions can be directly assessed.

The analysis of theory identification and frequency of use revealed ten key theories related to OC, explored across seven distinct contexts, including disciplinary, historical, cultural, social, practical, interdisciplinary, and global perspectives. These theories were grouped into three broad categories: individual behavioral theories, social behavioral theories, and technology



behavior theories. Among these, Social Exchange Theory, Psychological Contract Theory, Identity Theory, and Leader-Member Exchange Theory emerged as the most frequently cited, collectively accounting for nearly a quarter of the reviewed publications. These theories provide a conceptual foundation for examining variables closely associated with organizational commitment, trust, and leadership, which were the primary constructs of interest in this systematic review. A classification scheme was employed to map the focus of these studies, revealing a predominance of qualitative research and a strong emphasis on model development, particularly within the individual behavioral theories.

Individual behavioral theories have exerted the most significant influence on model development and advancement, reflecting researchers' interest in micro-level behavioral analysis, human motivation, and psychological processes. In model testing, however, both individual and social behavioral theories share equal representation, indicating their complementary roles in explaining organizational phenomena. Social behavioral theories lead in model comparison studies, likely due to their broader applicability in understanding group dynamics and interdependent social interactions within organizations. The prominence of research on individual behavioral theories can be attributed to several factors, including the complexity of human behavior, the practical relevance of understanding employee attitudes, the evolution of research perspectives in organizational studies, and the growing demand for empirically validated insights into workplace behavior [84-88].

Model testing demonstrates the interdependence of individual and social behavioral theories, as combining micro-level insights with group-level analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of organizational commitment. Both types of theories continue to evolve in response to technological advancements and changing workplace conditions, maintaining their practical relevance and theoretical significance [89, 90]. Empirical research dominates the OC literature, reflecting the methodological preference for objective, evidence-based approaches. Qualitative studies also remain relevant, particularly in exploring nuanced psychological and social mechanisms underlying commitment. Employees are consistently the primary focus of these studies, with surveys being the preferred data collection method due to their efficiency in capturing perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. The strength of empirical research lies in its replicability, generalizability, and ability to provide credible and measurable findings, which enhances the scientific rigor of OC studies, particularly when investigating individual behavioral processes.

## Conclusion and Future Scope of Research

This systematic review was guided by four primary research questions examining organizational commitment (OC) and its interrelationship with trust and leadership. Numerous scholars have recognized the strong linkage among these three constructs and emphasized the need for continued investigation in this area [5, 6, 91, 92]. The first question focused on identifying the theoretical foundations that have shaped the understanding of OC in connection with trust and leadership. The review revealed ten major theories, classified into three overarching perspectives—individual behavioral, social behavioral, and technology behavioral theories—each examined within seven contextual frameworks. Notably, six of these theories represented roughly 78% of all publications, suggesting their strong potential in forming an integrated conceptual model uniting OC, trust, and leadership.

The second question examined publication trends and research productivity within OC scholarship. Between 1985 and 2023, publication output peaked in 2011, with 26 studies released that year. This spike may be linked to the 2008 global financial crisis, which redirected academic and corporate attention toward enhancing organizational culture as a strategy for resilience and recovery. Google Scholar was identified as the most frequently used database for locating studies, while SCOPUS emerged as the preferred indexing platform due to its broad coverage and reliable citation tracking. The United States, followed by the United Kingdom and India, accounted for the largest share of publications—a pattern likely influenced by research funding availability, strong institutional infrastructure, and extensive scholarly networks. Approximately 78% of all reviewed studies revolved around six central theories closely aligned with OC, leadership, and trust. Among these, Social Exchange Theory and Psychological Contract Theory were most prevalent, each constituting about 15% of the total, while Identity Theory and Leader-Member Exchange Theory each represented around 13%. Although qualitative methodologies were commonly applied, empirical research dominated overall, with employees serving as the most frequent unit of analysis. Furthermore, most model development efforts were grounded in empirical designs that drew upon individual behavioral theories.

The third research question aimed to evaluate the present stages of theoretical model development, testing, advancement, and comparison within OC literature, thereby revealing several notable research gaps. Five areas were identified as priorities for future exploration. The first involves the limited understanding of how technology-related behavioral frameworks influence OC, particularly regarding model testing and advancement. Theories such as Social Exchange Theory (SET), Expectancy Theory (EXT), Process Control Theory (PCT), Equity Theory (EQT), and Leadership Exchange Theory (LXT) could serve as a basis for developing more comprehensive models linking OC with trust and leadership. The second gap concerns the insufficient advancement of models examining the social behavior of individuals within organizational contexts. Six theories, including SET, LXT, and EQT, have been identified as promising for addressing this shortfall. Thirdly, there is a lack of

empirical evidence supporting model advancement and comparison using grounded theory methodologies. The fourth gap highlights the need to extend OC model development across a broader range of research designs—such as case-based, empirical, descriptive, and analytical approaches. Lastly, more systematic comparative studies, document analyses, and descriptive research are needed to deepen understanding of model testing within OC. Together, these gaps present rich opportunities for scholars to expand theory and practice in the domain of organizational commitment and change.

The fourth and final research question sought to explore organizational commitment by positioning leadership as a primary determinant and trust as a mediating factor. The findings revealed that eight dominant theories have been consistently used to connect OC with trust and leadership, underscoring the importance of analyzing these relationships at a dimensional level. Understanding which leadership attributes align best with specific organizational contexts is essential. Both leadership and trust are multidimensional constructs, encompassing elements such as communication, competence, integrity, fairness, cultural alignment, and prior experiences—all of which influence employees' perceptions of leadership credibility [93-96]. These dimensions must be incorporated into future conceptual models integrating organizational commitment, leadership, and trust.

Certain limitations of this review warrant consideration. Although the chosen publication timeframe is well justified, future reviews could benefit from extending the range to capture emerging trends. Additionally, the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in systematic literature reviews are often open to debate, as some relevant works may have been unintentionally excluded. The study's focus on OC, trust, and leadership—while purposeful—may also have excluded other influential variables deserving of future attention. Similarly, the selection of ten theoretical frameworks reflects only a portion of the broader theoretical landscape, and alternative classifications could yield additional insights depending on the researcher's interpretive stance.

In the modern knowledge economy—where innovation, adaptability, and human capital drive success—sustaining employee commitment has become a critical determinant of organizational competitiveness. Leadership rooted in mutual trust stands as a cornerstone of this process. This systematic literature review offers an evidence-based synthesis that not only clarifies the theoretical and empirical evolution of OC research but also provides a foundation for future investigations seeking to strengthen the interplay between leadership, trust, and employee commitment.

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