

Effects of Supervisors' Leadership Style on Employee Organizational Commitment in Taiwan's Small and Medium Enterprises: the Role of Trust

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Abstract

This study collected questionnaires from 369 employees of small and medium enterprises in Taiwan, where the economic structure is dominated by SMEs, in order to analyze the effects of leadership style on organizational commitment and explore the role of trust between them. After factor analysis (exploratory, confirmatory), reliability and validity testing, multiple comparisons, and multiple regression analysis, the following results are obtained: (1) leadership style has significantly positive effects on organizational commitment; (2) leadership style has significantly positive effects on employees' trust in supervisors and colleagues; (3) employees' trust in supervisors and colleagues has significantly positive effects on organizational commitment; and (4) trust has mediating effects between leadership style and organizational commitment.

Keywords: small and medium enterprises, leadership style, trust, organizational commitment

1. Introduction

According to the 2020 White Paper on Small and Medium Enterprises released by the Ministry of Economic Affairs (Taiwan), in 2019, there were 1,491,420 small and medium enterprises in Taiwan, accounting for 97.65% of all enterprises, and 9,054,000 employees in the SMEs, accounting for 78.73% of all employees in the country, which shows that Taiwan's economic structure is dominated by SMEs (Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2020). Bass (1990) pointed out that, half of the success or failure of an enterprise depends on supervisors' leadership style, and supervisors at all levels are the backbone of small and medium enterprises, as well as the leaders to accomplish the tasks assigned by enterprises. Supervisors with leadership skills can motivate employees to do their best to strive for organizational goals (DuBrin, 2004). Successful supervisors can build good relationships with their staff, exercise their influence, lead their teams to achieve the goals set by enterprises (Pierce & Newstrom, 2000; Yukl, 2006), motivate their staff to have a strong sense of belonging to the enterprises, accept organizations' purposes and visions, enhance commitments to retention, and continue to contribute to enterprises loyally (Buchanan, 1974; Robinson, 1996). For enterprises, trust is about employees' trust in their supervisors and mutual trust among colleagues. In general, for an organization, supervisors' superior leadership style, excellent literacy, correct decision-making directions, and fair and just values are factors that win staff trust. However, supervisors and staff must trust each other for supervisors to exercise their outstanding leadership skills (Burke et al., 2007). When a supervisor cares about their staff with a fair and honest attitude, they will surely win the staff's trust and affection, and the staff will try their best for their superiors and enterprises (Bartram & Casimir, 2007). In addition to staff's trust in their supervisors, mutual trust among colleagues is very important to enterprises, as members' trust in each other's integrity and talent can enhance interactions within organizations and strengthen the working relationships (Aulakh et al., 1996). In a harmonious and trusted working environment, employees feel safe and dignified, and have enthusiasm for their work, and thus, have a strong sense of belonging to the organization, and will not easily leave their jobs.

According to the above statements regarding supervisors' leadership style, trust, and organizational commitment, this paper explores the following 4 issues:

1. Effects of supervisors' leadership style on organizational commitment.

2. Effects of supervisors' leadership style on trust.
3. Effects of trust on organizational commitment.
4. Trust has mediating effects between leadership style and organizational commitment.

2. Literature Overview

2.1 Leadership Style

Leadership is the basis of the competitive advantages of enterprises (Porter & Lawler, 1968), and leadership style is the primary factor for the success or failure of organizations (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Burns (1978) classified leadership style into two types in his book *Leadership*: transformational leadership and transactional leadership, and many scholars since have focused on transformational leadership and transactional leadership in their studies on leadership style-related theories (Lowe & Gardner, 2000; Brown & Keeping, 2005). Burns argued that transformational leadership was a process of interaction between supervisors and their staff, in which supervisors advocated organizations' ideals and values, and staff were expected to sacrifice their personal interests for the enterprise's overall interests. Bennis and Nanus (1985) argued that transformational leadership means that supervisors make good use of their powers and situation-related beneficial factors to stimulate members' innovative ideas and abilities, and they can immediately adjust the organization's response measures to adapt to the changing environment during fierce competition. Burns pointed out that, transactional leadership style encourages staff to complete tasks by reward and correct their mistakes by punishment. Under the principle of exchange and mutual benefit, provided they achieve the desired goals, staff believe that they will be rewarded with specific values. In the process of benefit exchange between supervisors and employees, after supervisors set goals for work performance, if employees behave according to supervisors' instructions, they can obtain rewards when achieving the goals (Bass, 1985). Bass and Avolio (1994) classified transformational leadership into 4 leadership behaviors: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized care, and spiritual inspiration, and transactional leadership into two leadership styles: contingent reward and management by exception.

2.2 Organizational Commitment

Whyte (1956) elaborated on the concept and significance of organizational commitment in his book *The Organization Man*, and argued that individuals work hard for organizations and were closely attached to organizations, thus, generating the feelings of sharing weal and woe. According to Mowday et al. (1982), organizational commitment referred to the strength of loyalty and dedication by individuals in an organization, and showed the connections between individuals and organizations. Such connections are not only extremely important to individuals, but of high value to enterprises and the whole society. Clercq and Rius (2007) also advocated that organizational commitment meant that members of an organization accept the organization's purpose and vision, and were eager to continue working in the organization. It also referred to how much one contributes to an organization and how much one is loyal to an organization (Kanter, 1968). Hence, high organizational commitment will motivate organization members to fulfill tasks more actively (Erdem & Uçar, 2013).

2.3 Trust

Cook and Wall (1980) summarized trust into two constructs. (1) Trust in supervisors: organization members believe that supervisors should have the following qualities: professional skills, honesty, courage to take responsibility, care for staff, and give staff enough room to work independently, and these qualities are the leadership skills appreciated by staff. (2) Trust in colleagues: it means that one trusts their colleagues 'work competence, they can cooperate with them, they trust that colleagues can help each other, and they have integrity and treat each other sincerely. In his book *The Consequences of Modernity*, Giddens (1990) proposed two levels of trust: interpersonal trust and system trust. Interpersonal trust refers to the trust relationship between people's abilities, words, deeds, and personality consistency, which is on the individual level. System trust refers to trust in the operations of the organizational system, which is determined by whether the organizational system fulfills its expected functions. This is the trust in professional systems. With organizational hierarchy as the method to classify trust, McCauley and Kuhnert (1992) classified organizational trust into horizontal trust and vertical trust. The former refers to the mutual-trust cooperative relationship between peers or departments in organizations, and the latter focuses on the trust relationship between members and supervisors at all levels. Nyhan (1999) also interpreted trust in organizations, and classified it into the following two fields: (1) Personal trust: refers to the trust that members of an organization have in each other through their interpersonal interactions, and is the trust relationship between individuals and others. (2) System trust: refers to organization members 'identification and trust in regulation making, business decision direction, and management mechanism implementation at the senior supervisor level, meaning the trust relationship among organizational members of the entire organization.

3. Methods

3.1 Research framework and hypotheses

This paper proposes the following research framework and four hypotheses:

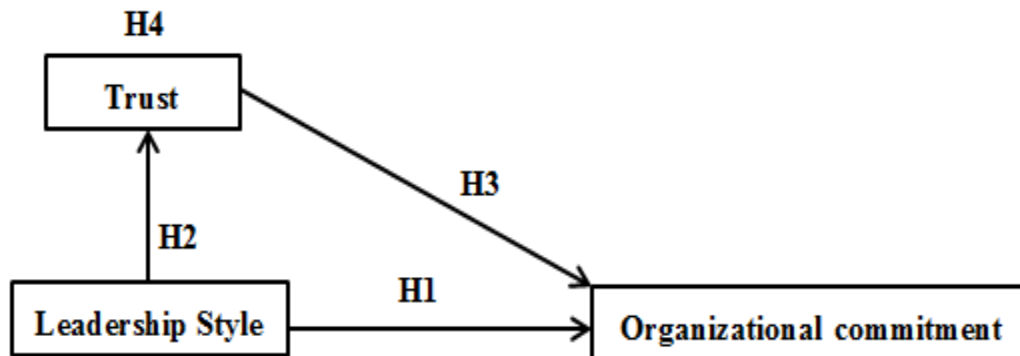


Figure 1. Research framework

Hypothesis 1: Leadership style has significantly positive effect on organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 2: Leadership style has significantly positive effect on trust.

Hypothesis 3: Trust has significantly positive effect on organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 4: Trust has a mediating effect between leadership style and organizational commitment.

3.2 Variable definition and evaluation

In this study, leadership style (LS) is an independent variable and defined as: leadership behavior that makes good use of leadership skills to motivate staff to exert their potentials and encourages staff to show their talents (Fry, 2003). Transformational leadership and transactional leadership are the sub-dimensions of this variable, and 4 items in the MLQ scale (Bass & Avolio, 2000) are used in this questionnaire. Organizational commitment (OC) is a dependent variable and defined as: the intensity of employee loyalty to enterprise organizations (Porter et al., 1974). This paper adopted three dimensions for discussion, affective commitment, continuous commitment, and normative commitment, as suggested by former scholars, and integrated by Meyer and Allen (1997), and used 4 items in the questionnaire scale, as designed by two scholars (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Trust (TR) is a mediating variable between leadership style (LS) and organizational commitment (OC), and defined as: the confidence an employee has in the words, actions, talents, and decisions of other members of an enterprise organization (MacAllister, 1995). This variable discusses the two constructs summarized by Cook and Wall (1980), namely, trust in supervisors and trust in colleagues, and there are 4 items in the scale.

3.2 Research Samples

Through the industrial and vocational unions of various industries, this study issued questionnaires to employees below the level of junior supervisors (including) in Taiwan's SMEs for investigation. A 7-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932) was used as the measurement tool, and the anonymous mode was adopted. Subjects were asked to select the appropriate options according to their true feelings, and 1-7 points were granted according to "strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neutral, somewhat agree, agree and strongly agree", respectively. In January 2020, a small sample of 50 pre-test questionnaires was issued, and after collection, scholars and experts were invited to correct the items. Formal questionnaires were issued in February 2020 and collected in October 2020, for a total of 10 months. This study issued 537 questionnaires and collected 422 completed questionnaires. After 53 invalid questionnaires from those above middle-level supervisors and others were excluded, there were 369 valid questionnaires, for an effective rate of 68.7%. The basic statistical data of the subjects is shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Basic statistical data of subjects

Statistical items	Answer options	Number of people	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	198	53.7
	Female	171	46.3
Age	Under 30years old	48	13.0
	31~ 40years old	127	34.4
	41~ 50years old	129	35.0
	Above 51years old	65	17.6
Years of working	Under 5 years	41	11.1
	6 ~ 15 years	162	43.9
	16 ~ 25 years	134	36.3
	Above 25 years	32	8.7
Educational background	Below high (vocational) school graduate	76	20.6
	Junior college	263	71.3
	Graduate school	30	8.1

Note: n=369

4. Results

4.1 Factor Analysis

There are 3 variables in this study, LS(4 items), OC (4 items), and TR (4 items), for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis(CFA).

4.1.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

The test values of the 3 variables in this study are:Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) =0.854~0.862(must be >0.5, Kaiser, 1974); Bartlett's test (must be significant, Bartlett,1951), the P values of the 3 variables are 0.000,which represent significance; eigenvalues=3.168~3.346(must be >1, Harman, 1976); factor loadings= 0.841~0.897(must be >0.5, Hair et al., 2006); cumulative explained variance (%)=79.198~83.641(must be >40, Zaltman & Burger, 1975).According to Zaltman and Burger (1975), when the eigenvalue is >1, the factor loading must be>0.3 and the cumulative explained variance must be (%)>40, in order for factor analysis to be statistically significant. The test values in this study meet the above requirements, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. EFA test table

Variables	Items	Factor loadings	KMO values	Eigen values	Cumulative explained variances (%)
LS	1. My supervisor exudes professionalism and confidence	0.867	0.862	3.272	81.796
	2. My supervisor often boosts the morale of staff	0.857			
	3. My supervisor shows concern for me and my family	0.876			
	4. My supervisor often motivates staff with rewards	0.880			
OC	1. I have a strong sense of belonging to the company	0.897	0.862	3.346	83.641
	2. I am willing to devote myself to the company	0.883			
	3. I will have trouble if leaving, so I must hold my job	0.892			
	4. I will feel guilty if leaving	0.865			
TR	1. My supervisor does whatever is promised	0.866	0.854	3.168	79.198
	2. I enjoy working with my supervisor	0.841			
	3. My colleagues will assist me when I need help	0.848			
	4. I have confidence in the work skills of my colleagues	0.846			

Note: n=369

4.1.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

In this study, SEM is used to measure the goodness of fit indices of the model, and the test values are, as follows: $\chi^2=43.682$, $df=51$, $\chi^2/df=0.857$ (must be <3 , Kline, 2005), $GFI=0.981$ (must be >0.9 , Hu & Bentler, 1999), $SRMR=0.017$ (must be <0.05 , Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989), $RMSEA=0.000$ (must be <0.05 , McDonald & Ho, 2002), $NFI=0.988$ (must be >0.9 , Byrne, 1994), $TLI=1.003$ (must be >0.9 , Bentler & Bonett, 1980), $CFI=1.000$ (must be >0.95 , Hu & Bentler, 1999). Overall, the test values of the above goodness of fit indices meet the standards required by statisticians, which indicates the model has high goodness of fit.

4.2 Reliability and validity

Reliability measures the consistency of the questionnaire, and Cronbach's α coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) is used in this study for measurement: $LS=0.926$, $OC=0.935$, and $TR=0.912$, which indicate that all above values reach high reliability, meaning greater than 0.7, as advocated by George and Mallery (2003). In terms of convergent validity and composite reliability (CR): $LS=0.926$, $OC=0.935$, $TR=0.913$: $LS=0.926$, $OC=0.935$, $TR=0.913$, which are all greater than 0.6 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981); average variance extracted (AVE): $LS=0.757$, $OC=0.782$, $TR=0.723$, which are all greater than 0.5 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Based on the test results, the convergence validity in this study is good, as shown in Table 3. There are two methods to test discriminant validity. The first is to compare the AVE and correlation coefficient: according to the measurement model of Fornell and Larcker (1981), the AVE value of each latent variable must be greater than the square of the correlation coefficient between the variable and other potential variables, which indicates that all the variables have good discriminant validity. According to Table 4, in addition to good discriminant validity, all latent variables in this model are positively correlated. In conclusion, the hypotheses of this study have been preliminarily proven. The second factor is the goodness-of-fit comparison of SEM. Compared with the two-factor model and the single-factor model, if with high goodness of fit, the three-factor model (comparison-based model) has good discriminant validity (Liang et al., 2012). As shown in Table 5, the three-factor model in this paper has high goodness of fit, which shows good discriminant validity.

Table 3. Reliability and validity test results

Variables	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
LS	0.926	0.926	0.757
OC	0.935	0.935	0.782
TR	0.912	0.913	0.723

Note:n=369

Table 4. Discriminant validity - test results of comparison of AVE

Variables	Average mean	Standard deviation	LS	OC	TR
LS	4.460	1.262	(0.757)		
OC	4.511	1.366	0.119 **	(0.782)	
TR	4.442	1.197	0.331 **	0.147 **	(0.723)

Note: n=369; those in bracketson the diagonal are the AVE values of the variable and must be greater than the square of the correlation coefficient between the variable and other variables(non-diagonal values); * p <0.05; ** p <0.01; *** p <0.001

Table 5. Discriminant validity -Factor goodness-of-fit comparison model

Factor structure models	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	GFI	SRMR	RMSEA	TLI
Three-factor model	43.682	51		0.981	0.017	0.000	1.003
Two-factor model	637.812	53	594.130	0.690	0.098	0.173	0.795
Single-factor model	1678.364	54	1634.682	0.481	0.180	0.286	0.442

Note:n=369; three-factor model (comparison-based model)=LS, OC, TR; two-factor model =LS+TR,OC; single-factor model =LS+OC+TR

4.3 Multiple Comparison Analysis

This study conducted t-testing of the independent samples of gender, which is a demographics attribute, and the test results show no significant difference between male and female. Post hoc testing was conducted on the other variables by Scheffe's one-way ANOVA, and the results are, as follows. Employees' feelings regarding leadership style (LS): those above 51 years old are significantly higher than those between 41 and 50, and those with a junior college degree are significantly higher than those below a high (vocational) school degree; employees' organizational commitment(OC):those with 16-25years of service are significantly higher than those with 6-15 years of service; employees' trust (TR)in supervisors and colleagues: those with 6-15years of service are significantly higher than those with less than5 years of service, and those with a junior college degree are significantly higher than thosebelow a high (vocational) school degree, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Multiple comparison analysis results

Basic data of subjects	LS	OC	TR
Gender	N	N	N
Age	4>3	N	N
Years of working	N	3>2	2>1
Educational background	2>1	N	2>1

Note: n=369; significance level: 0.05; gender: 1=male, 2=female; age: 1= under 30 years old, 2=31-40 years old, 3=41-50 years old, 4= above 51 years old; years of working: 1= under 5 years, 2=6-15 years,3=16-25 years, 4=above 25 years; educational background: 1= below high (vocational) school graduate, 2= junior college, 3= graduate school

4.3 Regression analysis

First, determine whether the independent variables are independent from each other, if no, the explanatory power and predictive power of the independent variables are much greater than the actual values, which affects measurement accuracy; hence, collinearity diagnostics must be conducted. In this study, the variance inflation factor (VIF)<2 (Sellin, 1990) is taken as the standard for multicollinearity analysis, and the result shows that the maximum VIF is 1.493, showing no collinearity. According to Table 7: from Model 1-Model 3, the regression coefficients of the simple

regression of all variables are positive and significant (0.345***, 0.575***, 0.383***, respectively), showing that all variables have positive effects. Model 4: after the multiple regression analysis of LS (independent variable) and TR (mediating variable) to OC (dependent variable), 0.186*** (significant), the regression coefficient of LS (independent variable) is weaker than 0.345*** (significant), the regression coefficient of the simple regression of LS (independent variable) to OC (dependent variable). According to the above conclusions, trust (TR) has partial mediating effect between leadership style (LS) and organizational commitment (OC) (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Table 7. Multiple regression test results

Dependent variables	TR		OC	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
LS	0.575***	0.345***		0.186***
TR			0.383***	0.276***
R	0.575	0.345	0.383	0.412
R ²	0.330	0.119	0.147	0.170
AdjR ²	0.329	0.116	0.144	0.165
F value	181.111***	49.463***	63.065***	37.427***

Note: n=369; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

5. Conclusion

This study collected a total of 369 valid questionnaires from employees in Taiwan's small and medium enterprises through industrial unions and vocational unions in various industries, conducted regression analysis, and made the following conclusions. (1) Leadership style (LS) has significantly positive effect on organizational commitment (OC) ($\beta=0.345$, $p<0.001$), indicating that the more suitable the supervisors' leadership style is for employees, the higher the employee loyalty to organizations, thus, H1 is supported. (2) Leadership style (LS) has significantly positive effect on trust (TR) ($\beta=0.575$, $p<0.001$), indicating that the better employees feel about their supervisor's leadership style, the more they trust their supervisors and colleagues, thus, H2 is supported. (3) Trust (TR) has significantly positive effect on organizational commitment (OC) ($\beta=0.383$, $p<0.001$), indicating that the more trust employees have in their supervisors and colleagues, the stronger their sense of belonging to the organization and the less likely they are to leave, thus, H3 is supported. (4) According to multiple regression analysis of leadership style (LS) and trust (TR) to organizational commitment (OC), the regression coefficient of leadership style (LS) (0.186, $p<0.001$) is less than that of the simple regression of leadership style (LS) to trust (TR) (0.345, $p<0.001$). According to Baron and Kenny (1986), in this model, trust (TR) has partial mediating effect. In other words, leadership style (LS) has positive effect on organizational commitment (OC), and positive effect on organizational commitment (OC) through trust (TR), thus, H4 is supported. The limitation of this study is that the cross-sectional study was carried out under a limited time factor, thus, the causes for some of the differences in the collected data were not deeply analyzed. Moreover, subjects' judgment of events is affected by individual subjective cognition, thus, the questionnaires will inevitably cause errors.

6. References

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