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The Influence of Leadership Challenges on Employee Retention: The Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment

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Abstract. Despite the rising cost of turnover, recruitment and training, the issue of employee retention continues to be one of the crucial challenges that all organizations have to address, whether they are publicly or privately held. Leaders are responsible for shaping up employees' working experience and making them decide to stay in the organizations. At the same time, various challenges that leadership faces, including poor communication, inconsistent decision-making, and lack of sufficient support from leaders to employees, as well as lack of employee recognition, continue to impact the organizational performance. This study analyzed the impact of leadership challenges on employee retention and the mediating effect of organizational commitment in this relationship. Based on social exchange theory, organizational commitment theory, and transformational leadership theory, the study suggested that leadership challenges negatively impact the commitment of employees to the organizations, which influences their desire to continue employment in the organizations. A quantitative cross-sectional research design employing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) applied to test the suggested hypotheses. It is expected that the results will add more evidence to the existing literature on leadership and retention.

Keywords: Employee retention; employee turnover; leadership challenges; organizational commitment; PLS-SEM

Introduction

Employee retention remains one of the most significant concerns for organizations across both public and private sectors. High employee turnover creates substantial financial and operational challenges, including recruitment costs, training expenses, productivity disruptions, and loss of organizational knowledge. Consequently, organizations continuously seek strategies to improve employee retention and maintain workforce stability. Recent research suggests that leadership practices play a crucial role in influencing employees' intentions to remain within their organizations. Effective leadership fosters supportive work environments, strengthens employee commitment, and enhances organizational outcomes, whereas leadership deficiencies often contribute to turnover intentions and reduced organizational attachment (Xuecheng et al., 2022; Xiong et al., 2023).

Leadership is increasingly recognized as a strategic organizational resource that shapes employee attitudes and behaviors. Studies have shown that transformational and transactional leadership styles significantly influence employee retention, employee engagement, and organizational commitment. In particular, transformational leadership has been associated with stronger retention outcomes due to its emphasis on inspiration, employee development, and organizational vision (Iqbal et al., 2020; Jiatong et al., 2022).

Recent evidence further indicates that leadership quality affects employees through psychological mechanisms, particularly organizational commitment. Organizational commitment refers to employees' emotional attachment, identification with, and involvement in their organizations. Employees who exhibit higher levels of commitment are generally less likely to leave their organizations and more likely to contribute positively to organizational performance (Mokoena et al., 2022; Rawashdeh et al., 2022).

The growing complexity of modern workplaces has increased the importance of understanding how leadership challenges affect employee retention. Leadership challenges may include ineffective communication, inadequate employee support, inconsistent decision-making, lack of recognition, and limited employee empowerment. Such challenges can undermine trust, reduce employee morale, and weaken commitment toward organizational goals. Research has consistently demonstrated that supportive

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leadership contributes to stronger organizational commitment and reduced turnover intentions (Jun et al., 2023; Xuecheng et al., 2022).

Bibliometric evidence further reveals a growing scholarly interest in the relationship between leadership and organizational commitment. Recent analyses indicate that leadership and commitment remain among the most influential constructs in organizational behavior research, reflecting their importance in explaining employee retention and performance (Abu Orabi et al., 2024).

Despite extensive research examining leadership, organizational commitment, and employee retention, existing studies have predominantly focused on specific leadership styles, such as transformational and authentic leadership, and their relationships with employee engagement, organizational commitment, turnover intention, and employee retention (Iqbal et al., 2020). However, limited attention has been given to examining broader leadership challenges as antecedents of employee retention while simultaneously testing organizational commitment as a mediating mechanism. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the influence of leadership challenges on employee retention and determine whether organizational commitment mediates this relationship.

Literature Review

Leadership Challenges and Employee Retention

Employee retention remains a central concern in organizational research because employee turnover can disrupt organizational operations, increase replacement and training costs, and contribute to the loss of organizational knowledge and experienced employees. Leadership represents an important organizational factor influencing employees' attitudes toward continued organizational membership. Previous research has demonstrated that transformational leadership can contribute to employee retention by strengthening organizational citizenship behavior and communication within organizations (Iqbal et al., 2020). Similarly, leadership practices may influence employees' intentions to remain with or leave their organizations through employees' perceptions of workplace relationships and organizational experiences. Xuecheng et al. (2022) demonstrated that situational leadership contributes to employee retention through mechanisms explained by Social Exchange Theory, emphasizing the importance of reciprocal relationships between employees and their organizations. Authentic leadership has also been associated with reduced employee turnover intention through perceived supervisor support and organizational identification (Jun et al., 2023). Moreover, transformational leadership has been shown to influence turnover intention among employees through psychological and organizational mechanisms (Xiong et al., 2023). Recent evidence further demonstrates that leadership practices can influence employee retention through intermediate employee attitudes and workplace experiences. Elshaer et al. (2025) found that green transformational leadership influences employee retention through job satisfaction and perceived green organizational support. These findings indicate that leadership may affect employees' decisions to remain in organizations both directly and indirectly through psychological and organizational mechanisms.

Leadership Challenges and Organizational Commitment

The relationship between leadership and organizational commitment has received considerable scholarly attention. A bibliometric analysis conducted by Abu Orabi et al. (2024) demonstrated the continuing development of research examining leadership and organizational commitment and identified these constructs as important areas of investigation in organizational and management research performance (Abu Orabi et al., 2024). Empirical studies further demonstrate that leadership practices can contribute to the development of employees' organizational commitment. Transformational leadership positively influences affective organizational commitment, with employee engagement serving as an important mediating mechanism (Jiatong et al., 2022). The findings suggest that leadership behaviors characterized by inspiration, employee involvement, and support can strengthen employees' emotional attachment to their organizations. Leadership may also influence organizational commitment through reciprocal relationships between employees and organizational leaders. Leadership practices can promote favorable employee attitudes and retention outcomes through mechanisms explained by Social Exchange Theory (Xuecheng et al., 2022). Employees who perceive supportive treatment from leaders may reciprocate by developing stronger attachment, loyalty, and positive attitudes toward their organizations. These findings provide empirical support for examining leadership-related factors as antecedents of organizational commitment.

Organizational Commitment and Employee Retention

Organizational commitment represents an important organizational attitude associated with employees' intentions to remain with or leave their organizations. Employees with stronger organizational

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commitment generally demonstrate lower turnover intentions and greater willingness to maintain organizational membership. Mokoena et al. (2022), in their study of employees in a government department, demonstrated the relationship among talent management, organizational commitment, and employee turnover intention, emphasizing the importance of organizational commitment in explaining employees' intentions to leave their organizations. Similarly, Rawashdeh et al. (2022) found that organizational commitment plays an important role in explaining turnover intention and functions as a mediating mechanism between human resource development and employees' intentions to leave. Their findings suggest that organizational practices that strengthen employee commitment may contribute to reduced turnover intentions. Evidence from the public sector also demonstrates the relevance of organizational commitment to employees' turnover intentions. Xia et al. (2022), examining temporary employees in local government, found a significant relationship between organizational commitment and turnover intention. The study further demonstrated that perceived insider status serves as a mediating mechanism in this relationship. These findings indicate that employees' psychological attachment to their organizations is an important factor associated with continued organizational membership and workforce stability.

The Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment has increasingly been examined as a mediating variable through which organizational practices influence employees' turnover-related outcomes. Mediation occurs when the effect of an antecedent variable on an outcome is transmitted, either partially or completely, through an intervening variable. In organizational research, commitment can serve as a psychological mechanism through which favorable organizational experiences influence employees' intentions to remain with or leave their organizations. Rawashdeh et al. (2022) provided empirical evidence supporting the mediating role of organizational commitment in explaining turnover intention. Their study demonstrated that human resource development influences employees' turnover intentions through organizational commitment, indicating that organizational practices may reduce intentions to leave by strengthening employees' psychological attachment to their organizations. Mokoena et al. (2022) similarly demonstrated the importance of organizational commitment within a framework explaining employee turnover intention in a government organization. Their findings reinforce the importance of commitment as an explanatory construct linking organizational practices and employees' turnover-related outcomes. Related studies examining leadership mechanisms further support the theoretical basis for positioning organizational commitment as an intervening variable. Jiatong et al. (2022) demonstrated that transformational leadership influences affective organizational commitment through employee engagement, while Iqbal et al. (2020) showed that transformational leadership affects employee retention through organizational citizenship behavior and communication. Although these studies examined different mediating mechanisms, their findings demonstrate that leadership influences employee outcomes through intervening psychological and behavioral processes. Taken together, the literature demonstrates established relationships between leadership and employee retention, leadership and organizational commitment, and organizational commitment and turnover-related outcomes. However, previous studies have predominantly examined specific leadership styles, such as transformational, authentic, situational, and green transformational leadership, rather than broader leadership challenges experienced by employees. Furthermore, relatively limited attention has been given to simultaneously examining the direct effect of leadership challenges on employee retention and the indirect effect transmitted through organizational commitment. Addressing this gap, the present study examines organizational commitment as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between leadership challenges and employee retention.

Methodology

Research Design

The research adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, and explanatory design to study the effect of leadership problems on employees' retention and assess the mediating effect of organizational commitment. For the research, a structural equation model based on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used, as it allows the examination of complex relationship structures involving mediator variables. PLS-SEM is widely applied in organizational behavior studies because of its predictive qualities and capability to analyze non-normally distributed data (Hair et al., 2019) .

Sampling Design

It was suggested to use a stratified random sampling technique. It was planned to stratify employees by sector and organizational level, then apply simple random sampling within each stratum.

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Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected public and private organizations. The locale was selected because it provided access to employees from diverse organizational sectors and positions relevant to examining leadership challenges, organizational commitment, and employee retention. Data were collected electronically through Google Forms over a four-week period.

Research Participants

The participants of the study were 450 employees from selected public and private organizations. Participants were at least 18 years old and had been employed for at least six months. They represented supervisory, managerial, administrative, technical, and operational positions. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across employment sectors and organizational levels.

Research Instrument

The study utilized a structured survey questionnaire composed of four sections. Section A gathered the participants' demographic information, including age, gender, educational attainment, employment sector, length of service, and position level. Section B measured leadership challenges in terms of communication deficiencies, lack of employee recognition, inadequate support, inconsistent decision-making, and limited employee empowerment. Section C assessed organizational commitment through affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Section D measured employee retention based on employees' intention to remain with the organization and organizational loyalty. Items in Sections B, C, and D were rated using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire items were adapted from relevant literature and aligned with the study variables to ensure their relevance to the research objectives.

Data Gathering Procedure

With proper authorization from the organization, the questionnaires were electronically sent to participants using Google Forms. It was a voluntary process, whereby the participants were told about the purpose of the study, basically before anything else. Data was gathered over a four-week period.

Results and Discussions

Respondents' Demographic Profile

A total of 450 employees participated in the study. Among the respondents, 54.2% were female and 45.8% were male. Regarding age distribution, 34.0% were between 21–30 years old, 38.7% were between 31–40 years old, 19.6% were between 41–50 years old, and 7.7% were above 50 years old. In terms of employment sector, 52.4% were employed in private organizations while 47.6% were employed in public organizations. Most respondents possessed a bachelor's degree (61.8%), followed by master's degree holders (24.9%), while the remaining respondents had either vocational qualifications or doctoral degrees. Regarding length of service, 29.3% had been employed for less than three years, 36.7% had served for four to seven years, and 34.0% had more than seven years of employment experience.

Table 1. Leadership Challenges

	Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	Communication Deficiencies	4.12	0.65	High
2.	Employee Recognition	3.95	0.71	High
3.	Inadequate Support	3.88	0.74	High
4.	Inconsistent Decision-Making	3.91	0.68	High
5.	Limited Empowerment	3.97	0.72	High
	Over-all Mean	**3.97**	**0.70**	**High**

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for leadership challenges. The overall mean score was 3.97 (SD = 0.70), indicating a high level of leadership effectiveness as perceived by employees. Among the dimensions, Communication Deficiencies obtained the highest mean score (M = 4.12, SD = 0.65), followed by Limited Empowerment (M = 3.97, SD = 0.72), Employee Recognition (M = 3.95, SD = 0.71), Inconsistent Decision-Making (M = 3.91, SD = 0.68), and Inadequate Support (M = 3.88, SD = 0.74). All dimensions were interpreted as high, suggesting favorable employee perceptions of leadership practices.

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Table 2. Organizational Commitment

	Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	Affective Commitment	4.08	0.69	High
2.	Continuance Commitment	3.95	0.73	High
3.	Normative Commitment	4.02	0.70	High
	Over-all Mean	**4.02**	**0.71**	**High**

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for organizational commitment. The overall mean score was 4.02 (SD = 0.71), indicating a high level of commitment among employees. Affective Commitment registered the highest mean score (M = 4.08, SD = 0.69), followed by Normative Commitment (M = 4.02, SD = 0.70) and Continuance Commitment (M = 3.95, SD = 0.73). The results indicate that respondents generally exhibit strong emotional attachment, loyalty, and commitment toward their organization

Table 3. Employee Retention

	Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	Intention to Stay	4.15	0.67	High
2.	Organizational Loyalty	4.09	0.71	High
3.	Reduced Turnover Intention	4.01	0.75	High
	Over-all Mean	**4.08**	**0.71**	**High**

As shown in Table 3, employee retention obtained an overall mean score of 4.08 (SD = 0.71), indicating a high level of retention intention among employees. Intention to Stay recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.15, SD = 0.67), followed by Organizational Loyalty (M = 4.09, SD = 0.71) and Reduced Turnover Intention (M = 4.01, SD = 0.75).

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated using indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Indicator Reliability

All construct indicators demonstrated satisfactory outer loadings ranging from 0.724 to 0.912, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. These results indicate that all indicators adequately measured their respective constructs.

Table 4. Outer Loadings of Measurement Items

	Construct	Loading Range
1.	Leadership Challenges	0.724 – 0.901
2.	Organizational Commitment	0.761 – 0.912
3.	Employee Retention	0.748 – 0.895

Internal Consistency Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70.

Table5. Reliability Statistics

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Leadership Challenges	0.921	0.938
Organizational Commitment	0.907	0.931
Employee Retention	0.893	0.922

Convergent Validity

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity.

Table6. Convergent Validity

Construct	AVE
Leadership Challenges	0.673
Organizational Commitmentss	0.692
Employee Retention	0.661

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Discriminant Validity

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values were below the threshold of 0.90, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table7. HTMT Values

Constructs	HTMT
Leadership Challenges – Organizational Commitment	0.782
Leadership Challenges – Employee Retention	0.731
Organizational Commitment – Employee Retention	0.845

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was evaluated using path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes, and significance levels through bootstrapping procedures involving 5,000 resamples.

Table8. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Leadership Challenges → Organizational Commitment	0.714	16.852	< .001	Supported
H2	Organizational Commitment → Employee Retention	0.621	13.947	< .001	Supported
H3	Leadership Challenges → Employee Retention	0.237	3.214	.001	Supported

The results indicate that leadership challenges significantly influence organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.714$, $p < .001$). This finding suggests that employees' perceptions of leadership practices strongly affect their level of commitment toward their organizations. Similarly, organizational commitment significantly influences employee retention ($\beta = 0.621$, $p < .001$), indicating that committed employees are more likely to remain employed within their organizations. The direct relationship between leadership challenges and employee retention was also significant ($\beta = 0.237$, $p = .001$), suggesting that leadership practices directly affect employees' intentions to stay.

Table9. Coefficient of Determination

Endogenous Variable	R^2
Organizational Commitment	0.510
Employee Retention	0.671

The R^2 value of 0.510 indicates that leadership challenges explain 51.0% of the variance in organizational commitment. Meanwhile, leadership challenges and organizational commitment collectively explain 67.1% of the variance in employee retention. According to Hair et al. (2019), these values indicate moderate to substantial predictive power.

Mediation Analysis

The mediating role of organizational commitment was assessed using bootstrapping procedures.

Table 10. Indirect Effect Analysis

Path	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Leadership Challenges → Organizational Commitment → Employee Retention	0.443	11.274	< .001

The indirect effect was significant ($\beta = 0.443$, $p < .001$), confirming that organizational commitment mediates the relationship between leadership challenges and employee retention. Since both the direct and indirect effects remained significant, partial mediation was established. This finding suggests that leadership challenges influence employee retention both directly and indirectly through organizational commitment.

Leadership practices were rated very positively, with empowerment, recognition, and communication being the top-rated dimensions. A high rating in communication indicates that leaders are effective in disseminating information, setting clear expectations, and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships. In this regard, communication effectiveness is an important leadership competency because effective leader–employee interactions can strengthen supportive relationships, positive employee attitudes, and organizational outcomes. Previous studies have similarly demonstrated that supportive leadership

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practices and positive leader–employee relationships contribute to favorable employee attitudes and reduced intentions to leave the organization (Xuecheng et al., 2022).

The results indicated that employees demonstrated high levels of organizational commitment, most notably affective commitment. This means that employees have a strong emotional attachment to and identification with their organizations. According to Organizational Commitment Theory, affective commitment represents employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization and is particularly relevant to employees' willingness to maintain organizational membership. Previous research has similarly demonstrated that stronger organizational commitment is associated with lower turnover intentions and greater workforce stability (Mokoena et al., 2022).

The results also demonstrated a high level of employee retention. Employees reported strong intentions to remain employed, high organizational loyalty, and low turnover intentions. These findings suggest that favorable leadership practices and strong organizational commitment contribute to employees' willingness to continue their organizational membership. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies demonstrating that leadership practices and organizational commitment are important factors associated with employee retention and reduced turnover intentions (Elshaer et al., 2025).

The structural model shows that leadership challenges have a significant effect on organizational commitment. This implies that when employees have favorable perceptions of their leaders, they tend to develop greater attachment and loyalty toward their organization. Hence, the results support Social Exchange Theory, according to which employees may reciprocate positive treatment and supportive relationships within the organization through favorable attitudes, stronger organizational commitment, and positive workplace behaviors. Previous research has similarly demonstrated that leadership practices can strengthen employees' organizational commitment and other positive organizational outcomes (Jiatong et al., 2022; Abu Orabi et al., 2024).

Furthermore, organizational commitment was found to significantly predict employee retention. Employees who develop strong emotional attachment and loyalty toward their organizations are more likely to continue working there. This finding is consistent with previous research demonstrating that organizational commitment is associated with lower turnover intentions and greater employee retention (Mokoena et al., 2022; Rawashdeh et al., 2022).

In addition, the study showed that leadership challenges directly affect employee retention. When employees perceive their leaders as communicative, supportive, and empowering, they are less likely to leave their organizations. This finding is consistent with previous research demonstrating that effective leadership practices contribute to stronger employee retention and reduced turnover intentions (Elshaer et al., 2025).

Finally, the mediation analysis confirmed that organizational commitment partially mediates the relationship between leadership challenges and employee retention. This finding indicates that leadership practices influence retention not only directly but also indirectly by strengthening employees' commitment toward their organizations. The result is consistent with previous research demonstrating that organizational commitment can function as an important psychological mechanism through which organizational and leadership-related factors influence turnover intentions and employee retention outcomes (Rawashdeh et al., 2022). Consequently, organizations seeking to improve employee retention should prioritize leadership development initiatives that enhance communication, support, recognition, and employee empowerment, as these practices can contribute to stronger organizational commitment and long-term workforce stability.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed the usual ethical expectations around voluntarism, confidentiality, and anonymity. Participants were informed that what they provided would be used solely for research purposes and reported in aggregate form.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of leadership challenges on employee retention, and it also explored the mediating effect of organizational commitment of employees from public and private organizations. The results have shown that leadership challenges have an important effect on the organizational commitment and employee retention. The employees with positive leadership, characterized by good communication, good supervision, employee appreciation, and consistency in decision-making, showed more organizational commitment and intention to stay within their organizations. Furthermore, the results of this research have proved that organizational commitment has a strong effect on employee retention. Emotional attachment, loyalty, and psychological connectedness of the employees to their organizations have been found to be associated with the willingness to retain their employment. It is worth noting that most importantly this research has revealed the mediating effect of organizational commitment between leadership challenges and employee retention. From the results of the analysis we can conclude

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that the leadership affects the employee retention not only directly but also indirectly due to the enhancement of the employees' commitment to the organizations. This research will make an important contribution to the development of the organizational behavior theory due to the expansion of existing leadership-retention models through the inclusion of organizational commitment as a mediating variable. The findings support Social Exchange Theory, Organizational Commitment Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory by demonstrating that supportive leadership practices foster stronger employee commitment and retention.

Reccomendations

The findings contribute to organizational behavior literature by providing empirical support for the proposition that organizational commitment functions as an explanatory mechanism linking leadership challenges and employee retention. While previous studies primarily focused on leadership styles, this study expands the literature by examining leadership challenges as organizational barriers affecting employee attitudes and retention outcomes. The results further reinforce Social Exchange Theory by demonstrating that employees reciprocate positive leadership experiences through commitment and loyalty. Similarly, Organizational Commitment Theory is supported by the finding that commitment significantly predicts employees' intentions to remain within organizations. The study also extends Transformational Leadership Theory by emphasizing the importance of leadership-related organizational practices in strengthening workforce stability. The findings provide important implications for organizational leaders, managers, and human resource practitioners. First, organizations may prioritize leadership development initiatives focusing on communication effectiveness, employee recognition, supportive supervision, and participative decision-making. Leadership competencies significantly influence employees' organizational experiences and retention intentions. Second, organizations may strengthen programs that foster organizational commitment. Initiatives promoting employee engagement, professional development, organizational support, and career growth opportunities may enhance employees' emotional attachment and loyalty toward the organization. Third, human resource departments may regularly assess employee perceptions regarding leadership effectiveness and commitment levels. Early identification of leadership-related concerns may help organizations address retention challenges before turnover intentions develop. Finally, organizations may recognize organizational commitment as a strategic organizational resource. Strengthening commitment may improve retention outcomes, employee performance, and overall organizational effectiveness.

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