

TL and OC from the Retail Sector in an Emerging Economy: Evidence from Vietnam

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Abstract: - The paper analyzes the impact of transformational leadership (TL) on employees' organizational commitment (OC) in the retail sector in Vietnam, an emerging economy. Based on social exchange theory, the study develops an analytical framework to clarify the relationship between TL and OC through idealized influence behavior (IIB), idealized influence attributes (IIA), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS), and individualized consideration (IC). The data were collected from a survey of full-time employees working in enterprises and were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The research results confirm that IM ($\beta = 0.29$; $p < 0.05$) and IC ($\beta = 0.25$; $p < 0.05$) have the strongest positive effects on OC in order to reduce turnover rates, improve service quality, and clarify the degree of influence of different aspects.

Key-Words: - Transformational leadership; Organizational commitment; Retail sector; Emerging economy; PLS-SEM; Vietnam.

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1 Introduction

Under the current situation, e-commerce and omnichannel selling on shopping platforms have comprehensively changed business models, business structures, and consumers, forcing enterprises to enhance responsiveness, service quality, and operational efficiency [1], [2], [3]. Management capability depends on technological processes, the quality of employees who interact directly with customers, and the shopping experience environment [4], [5].

Retail is a labor-intensive industry that faces a high risk of workforce instability due to job pressure, flexible schedules, unstable income, and uneven career development opportunities. This issue is more pronounced in emerging economies, where job quality and welfare systems remain limited, making turnover intentions and disengagement more likely to increase [6], [7]. High labor turnover increases recruitment and training costs, disrupts operations, worsens service quality, and damages brand reputation over time [8], [9], [10].

In organizational behavior research, OC is a psychological construct that reflects employees' level of attachment, loyalty, and willingness to exert effort toward organizational goals [11], [12]. A substantial body of empirical and review research shows that OC is positively associated with job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and

organizational outcomes, while being negatively related to turnover intention [13], [14]. The three-component approach to organizational commitment emphasizes that OC comprises affective, continuance, and normative commitment, thereby providing a more comprehensive assessment of employees' underlying motives for remaining with an organization [15].

In the retail sector, characterized by high customer interaction, OC plays a crucial role because frontline employees' attitudes and behaviors directly influence service encounters, perceived satisfaction, and customer loyalty [16], [17]. Prior studies also indicate that in high-pressure work environments, OC is closely related to work engagement, the ability to maintain service quality, and the reduction of the risk of performance decline caused by occupational stress [18]. Strengthening OC, therefore, serves as a human resource tool that helps retail firms stabilize their workforce and enhance their competitive advantage [19], [20].

Among the determinants of organizational commitment, leadership style is critical because it shapes employees' work motivation, perceptions of fairness, trust, and the organizational support they receive [21]. Compared with traditional leadership approaches that emphasize control and short-term exchanges, TL stands out for its capacity to inspire, activate intrinsic motivation, encourage individual development, and align employees toward shared goals [22], [23]. Transformational leadership was

initially introduced and subsequently developed as an influential approach in contemporary management research [24], [25].

International studies and meta-analytic evidence suggest that TL has a positive effect on attitudinal outcomes such as satisfaction, trust, and OC and often demonstrates a stronger influence than other leadership styles [22], [23], [24], [25], [26], [27]. From a measurement perspective, the dominant approach, derived from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), conceptualizes TL as a multidimensional construct comprising IIB, IIA, IM, IS, and IC [28]. This decomposed, multidimensional conceptualization identifies which specific leadership behaviors exert the strongest impact on organizational commitment, enhancing the feasibility and managerial relevance of practical implications in retail service contexts [27], [29].

Although international findings are relatively consistent, many scholars emphasize that the magnitude and mechanisms of TL effects vary across cultures, industries, and levels of labor market development. That is, in cultures that value collectivism and hierarchy, certain leadership behaviors (attributes, role modeling, and individualized consideration) may be valued more highly than behaviors oriented toward stimulating innovation, particularly among frontline employees whose work is constrained by standardized procedures [30], [31]. Accordingly, empirical evidence from the retail sector in emerging economies remains in need of further consolidation, especially studies that examine the effects of individual TL dimensions on OC [31], [32].

In Vietnam, the retail industry has grown rapidly while facing workforce instability, especially among younger employees, raising the risk of labor shortages and deteriorating service quality. Based on social exchange theory, this study posits that TL fosters positive interactions and activates reciprocity mechanisms, prompting employees to respond with stronger attachment and commitment to the organization [33], [34]. Specifically, the study analyzes the effects of TL dimensions on OC among Vietnamese retail employees. It tests the model using PLS-SEM, providing empirical evidence and actionable managerial implications to help firms strengthen leadership capabilities, enhance employee attachment, and stabilize human resources [35].

2 Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

2.1 TL as a Multidimensional Construct

TL is a leadership style that exerts influence, establishes ethical role modeling, inspires through vision, encourages innovation, and supports individual development, thereby motivating employees to transcend self-interest and pursue collective goals [21]. Unlike transactional leadership, which emphasizes contingent exchanges and short-term performance relationships, TL seeks to transform employees' cognition, motivation, and identification with shared organizational goals [22], [23], [27].

Following widely adopted measurement approaches derived from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), TL is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of IIB, IIA, IM, IS, and IC [29]. This decomposed multidimensional approach helps identify which leadership behaviors exert a more pronounced influence on employees' attitudes and behaviors, offering greater managerial usefulness than relying solely on an aggregate TL construct.

Within the PLS-SEM framework, TL is modeled as a higher-order construct with decomposed dimensions. In this study, the decomposed multidimensional approach is adopted to avoid compensatory effects that may arise when dimensions are aggregated and to align with the practical managerial needs of Vietnamese retail firms in identifying which leadership behaviors should be prioritized for development.

2.2 OC and the Three Component Model

OC is a psychological state that reflects the extent of employees' attachment to an organization and their tendency to maintain membership [12]. As a central construct in organizational behavior research, OC is positively associated with job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and organizational outcomes and is negatively related to turnover intention [8], [13]. In retail, where frontline employees directly shape the service experience, OC is particularly important because it influences service quality and brand image.

The three-component model (TCM) indicates that affective commitment (AC), continuing commitment (CC), and normative commitment (NC) coexist in individuals at varying levels, providing reasons for employees to stay with an organization [12], [15]. In emerging economies, examining all three components simultaneously is necessary because employees remain due to emotional attachment, perceived costs

(or benefits) of leaving, and social or moral obligations [30].

2.3 Social Exchange Theory and the Mechanisms Linking Leadership to Commitment

Social exchange theory (SET) is used to explain issues related to the resources of trust, respect, recognition, and support that are developed through interactions between individuals and the organization. SET posits that social exchange relationships develop over time and generate expectations of reciprocity between the parties [33], [34]. Individuals therefore tend to respond positively when they perceive favorable treatment from others [34]. When leaders create a work environment where employees perceive strong support and fairness, they will reciprocate with greater loyalty, engagement, and commitment to the organization.

From the SET perspective, transformational leadership promotes high-quality social exchange by providing employees with support, recognition, developmental opportunities, and meaningful leader-employee interactions. Transformational leaders inspire, encourage, guide, and care for employees, enabling them to see that their benefits are associated with their attachment to the organization, and they will work more positively.

In each different aspect, TL always contributes to strengthening employees' connection with the organization through the exchange process of IIB to promote trust, IIA to build relationships based on values, IM to increase work awareness, IS to stimulate participation in learning and problem-solving, and IC to support development and well-being.

In retail service environments characterized by heavy workloads, stressful customer interactions, and unstable working conditions, TL can sustain motivation and perceived organizational support, thereby strengthening employees' organizational commitment. Based on these grounds, it is affirmed that leadership plays a role in promoting organizational commitment through building and reinforcing strong social exchange relationships between leaders and employees.

2.4 Hypothesis Development

A synthesis of prior evidence indicates that TL positively influences OC, although the magnitude of effects may differ across TL dimensions depending on industry characteristics and cultural context [19]. Accordingly, this study adopts a decomposed multidimensional approach to test the direct effects of each TL dimension on OC.

IIB reflects leaders' role modeling behaviors, consistency, ethical conduct, and value-based orientation that strengthen employees' trust. When employees perceive their leaders as fair and trustworthy, they are more likely to increase their attachment to and commitment to the organization as a reciprocal response [25]. H1: IIB positively affects OC.

IIA emphasizes a leader's personal credibility, qualities, and image that employees admire. In cultures that place greater value on hierarchy and respect for authority, IIA creates stronger psychological bonds between employees and the organization [30]. H2: IIA positively affects OC.

IM captures leaders' capability to articulate an appealing vision, enhance the meaningfulness of work, and stimulate employees' intrinsic motivation. In retail, this dimension is particularly important because frontline jobs are demanding and motivation may easily decline; inspirational leadership can therefore sustain morale and strengthen long-term attachment [9], [18]. H3: IM positively affects OC [9].

IS reflects the extent to which leaders encourage employees to think differently, proactively propose improvements, and learn from problems [19]. In highly standardized retail environments, limited room for creativity may reduce IS's influence on OC relative to more people-oriented dimensions [1], [33]. Nevertheless, theoretically, IS is still expected to help employees feel empowered and supported in their development, thereby enhancing commitment. H4: IS positively affects OC.

IC refers to leaders' efforts to listen to, support, and coach employees based on their individual needs, thereby enhancing perceptions of respect and developmental investment [25]. In line with SET, when employees receive personalized support from leaders, they tend to reciprocate with loyalty and commitment. Given a young workforce and high employee turnover, IC is expected to exert the strongest influence in reducing turnover intention and strengthening attachment. H5: IC positively affects OC.

In the PLS-SEM model, the dependent variable OC is modeled as follows:

$$OC = \beta_1 IIB + \beta_2 IIA + \beta_3 IM + \beta_4 IS + \beta_5 IC + \varepsilon(1)$$

where: IIB, IIA, IM, IS, and IC represent the dimensions of TL; $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4, \beta_5$ are the estimated path coefficients, and ε is the error term.

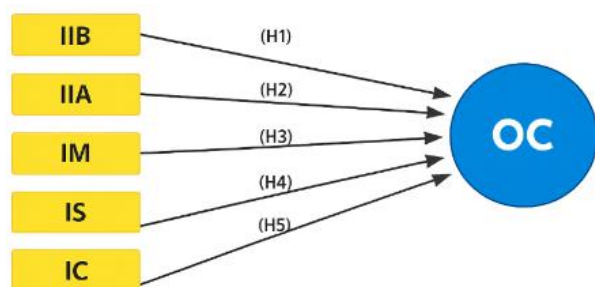


Fig. 1: Proposed Research Model

Source: created by the authors.

Based on the theoretical framework and the hypotheses developed above, the proposed research model is presented in Figure 1.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Data Collection Procedure

This study adopts a quantitative approach to test the direct effects of TL dimensions on OC among employees in the Vietnamese retail sector. A cross-sectional research design was employed, and data were collected at a single point in time using a structured questionnaire capturing employees' perceptions of leadership behaviors and their level of commitment to the organization.

A convenience sampling method was used due to the difficulty in accessing employees from many different retail companies. It was conducted using both in-person interviews and online surveys. Participants were recruited from supermarkets, electronics stores, and fashion chain stores in major urban areas of Vietnam. Only full-time employees with at least one year of organizational tenure were included to ensure sufficient exposure to leadership practices and organizational conditions.

A total of 342 questionnaires were distributed to employees working in various retail firms in Vietnam. After data screening, 314 valid responses were retained for analysis, corresponding to a response rate of 91.8%.

$$n_{min} \geq 10 \times \max(N)$$

where: N is the number of paths leading to the latent variable.

The minimum sample size under the 10-times rule was 50 observations because the maximum number of structural paths directed at the endogenous construct was five. Therefore, the final sample of 314 valid responses substantially exceeded the minimum requirement. The study used Cronbach's alpha,

composite reliability, and loading coefficients as scales. According to the PLS-SEM recommendations, the best external loading coefficient should exceed 0.70 with correspondingly high structural variance. The study retained loading coefficients between 0.60 and 0.70 when the composite reliability and AVE remained within the recommended thresholds.

3.2 Scales and Questionnaires

The study used scales with the structure and origin shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Measurement Scales

Construct	No. of items	Source/Adapted from
IIB	4	MLQ/TL
IIA	4	MLQ/TL
IM	4	MLQ/TL
IS	4	MLQ/TL
IC	4	MLQ/TL
AC	6	TCM
CC	6	TCM
NC	6	TCM

Source: Created by the authors.

Table 1. shows the use of a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) when using TL adjusted from the MLQ framework and OC adjusted from AC, CC, and NC

3.3 Data Analysis Method

3.3.1 Measurement Model

The Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient and composite reliability (CR) are accepted at thresholds of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ and $CR \geq 0.70$. CR was computed as follows:

$$CR = \frac{(\sum_{i=1}^k \lambda_i)^2}{(\sum_{i=1}^k \lambda_i)^2 + \sum_{i=1}^k (1 - \lambda_i^2)} \quad (2)$$

where: λ_i denotes the indicator (factor) loading; i is the item index (a constant identifying each indicator), and k is the number of observed indicators for the construct.

By using AVE, convergence is determined as follows:

$$AVE = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k \lambda_i^2}{k} \quad (3)$$

When $AVE \geq 0.50$, it indicates that at least 50% of the variance in the indices should be fully convergent.

3.3.2 Control of CMB

Since the data were collected from employees at the same time, common method bias (CMB) was addressed in the survey design and statistical testing:

- Design controls: Employee anonymity and voluntary participation are essential to minimize bias, avoid manipulation, and use concise, clear, and logical language.

- Statistical testing: If a factor does not explain 50% of the variance, CMB is ineffective. If all VIF values are below 3.3, CMB is not effective.

3.3.3 Criteria for structural model evaluation

After the measurement model met the requirements, the study tested the structural model to assess the fit and statistical significance of the hypothetical relationships H1-H5.

The effect (f^2) of the dependent and independent variables is evaluated by:

$$f^2 = \frac{R_{included}^2 - R_{excluded}^2}{1 - R_{included}^2} (4)$$

where: $R_{included}^2$ is the predictive variable included in the model, and $R_{excluded}^2$ is the predictive variable removed. Using conventional effect-size thresholds, f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and large effects, respectively [36].

Predictive relevance (Q^2): Predictive relevance was evaluated via blindfolding. A value of $Q^2 > 0$ indicates that the model has adequate predictive relevance for OC.

Although organizational commitment is generally conceptualized as a three-component construct comprising AC, CC, and NC, the present study treats OC as a higher-order aggregate in the empirical model. In this study, the items representing AC, CC, and NC were aggregated to form a single latent variable representing overall organizational commitment. This aggregation approach is commonly used in leadership research when the objective is to capture the overall strength of employees' organizational attachment rather than examining each component separately.

In the measurement stage, the items representing AC, CC, and NC were first validated individually and then aggregated to form a single latent construct representing overall OC.

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

The study uses survey data collected from full-time employees working in retail firms in Vietnam. The data were collected using a cross-sectional design and cleaned before PLS-SEM analysis to ensure the validity of the observed indicators.

The respondents generally held bachelor's degrees or vocational certificates relevant to retail service skills, and had approximately 3.8 years of work experience in organizations, thus possessing sufficient experience to assess leadership and organizational behavior.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 2 and collected from employees across various retail firms in Vietnam. After removing incomplete questionnaires and responses with missing values, the remaining observations were used for the PLS-SEM analysis.

Table 2. Characteristics of survey respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	142	45.2%
	Female	172	54.8%
Age	22–25	86	27.4%
	26–30	114	36.3%
	31–35	69	22.0%
	>35	45	14.3%
Education	Vocational/College	98	31.2%
	Bachelor	174	55.4%
	Postgraduate	42	13.4%
Work experience	1–3 years	121	38.5%
	3–5 years	109	34.7%
	>5 years	84	26.8%

Source: Created by the authors based on survey data.

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

4.2.1 Internal Consistency, Reliability, and Convergent Validity

Table 3. Results of reliability and convergent validity measurements

Code	α	CR	AVE
IIB	0.82	0.88	0.65
IIA	0.80	0.87	0.63
IM	0.86	0.91	0.72
IS	0.78	0.85	0.59
IC	0.85	0.90	0.70
OC	0.88	0.92	0.74

Source: Created by the authors based on survey data.

In Table 3, all reliability indices exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.7, thus meeting the requirements of the measurement scales.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) and composite reliability (CR), determined by the extracted mean variance (AVE) values, ranged from 0.59 to 0.74, exceeding the threshold of 0.5, indicating that the convergent validity of the measurement model is sufficient for the survey.

4.2.2 Discriminant Validity

To further verify the validity between the latent constructs, the HTMT criterion was tested, and the results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. HTMT Matrix

	IIB	IIA	IM	IS	IC	OC
IIB	-					
IIA	0.63	-				
IM	0.68	0.71	-			
IS	0.59	0.62	0.66	-		
IC	0.64	0.67	0.72	0.61	-	
OC	0.58	0.60	0.69	0.54	0.66	-

Source: Created by the authors based on survey data.

Table 4. shows a recommended threshold (HTMT) below 0.85 for evaluating experiments and multicollinearity that do not affect the structural model's validity

The Fornell–Larcker criterion was applied to confirm the discriminant validity, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	IIB	IIA	IM	IS	IC	OC
IIB	0.81					
IIA	0.63	0.79				
IM	0.68	0.71	0.85			
IS	0.59	0.62	0.66	0.77		
IC	0.64	0.67	0.72	0.61	0.84	
OC	0.58	0.60	0.69	0.54	0.66	0.86

Source: Created by the authors based on survey data.

Table 5. presents the Fornell-Larcker criteria used to evaluate HTMT less than 0.85, indicating the suitability of the structures

From the above, it can be seen that the model meets discriminant validity and the structures do not overlap.

4.3 Structural model assessment

4.3.1 Structural model results

The results indicate that all five dimensions of TL have positive effects on OC. Among them, IM and IC exhibit the strongest effects.

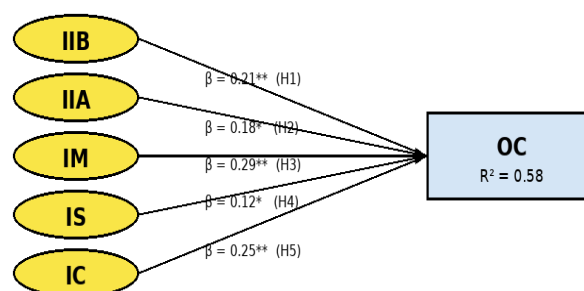


Fig. 2: Structural model results

Source: created by the authors.

Figure 2 presents the structural model obtained from PLS-SEM estimation. The results show that all aspects of TL have a path coefficient to OC, with IM and IC having the strongest impact on reinforcing employee commitment to the organization.

4.3.2 Hypothesis test assessment

To reinforce the positive role of TL in strengthening commitment to the hypothesis, see Table 6.

Table 6. Hypothesis (H) Testing Results

H	Relationship	β	t-value	P-value	Decision
H1	IIB $\rightarrow$ OC	0.21	3.42	< 0.05	Supported
H2	IIA $\rightarrow$ OC	0.18	2.85	< 0.05	Supported
H3	IM $\rightarrow$ OC	0.29	4.96	< 0.05	Supported
H4	IS $\rightarrow$ OC	0.12	2.01	< 0.05	Supported
H5	IC $\rightarrow$ OC	0.25	4.11	< 0.05	Supported

Source: Created by the authors based on survey data.

Table 6. reports the results of hypothesis tests based on bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. All five hypotheses are statistically significant ($t > 1.96$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that TL can enhance OC among retail employees in Vietnam's emerging economy

Path coefficients were estimated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to ensure robustness of statistical inference.

4.3.3 Predictive and effect size indicators

The OC has exogenous variables that reflect 58% ($R^2=0.58$) of the variance, exhibiting moderate to high explanatory power according to the aforementioned criteria.

f^2 captures the practical contribution of each predictor to the R^2 of the dependent variable. The results suggest that IM and IC provide more

meaningful practical contributions (with medium effect sizes), whereas the remaining dimensions exhibit smaller effects.

Table 7. Effect Sizes (f^2) of the Structural Relationships

Relationship	f^2	Magnitude
IIB → OC	0.07	Small
IIA → OC	0.05	Small
IM → OC	0.14	Medium
IS → OC	0.03	Small
IC → OC	0.11	Medium

Source: Created by the authors based on survey data.

Table 7. presents the effect size of each structural relationship, showing the degree of fit of the component predictions to the OC

5 Conclusions and implications

5.1 Conclusions

This study, investigating the impact of Leadership (IIB, IIA, IM, IS, and IC) on the OC of employees in the Vietnamese retail industry using PLS-SEM, has identified positive factors for companies to adopt. IM and IC have the strongest impact on OC; IIB and IIA positively influence ethical leadership, credibility, and trust; while IS has the smallest impact, it indicates that leadership's encouragement of creativity also contributes to the cohesion of the retail industry.

Analysis of the effect size further confirms that IM and IC contribute significantly more practically than other competitive factors.

Overall, the findings support multidimensional TL as an essential mechanism for enhancing organizational commitment in Vietnam's retail sector and offer implications for leadership development to increase employee retention and service quality.

5.2 Implications

Research results show that TL plays a role in enhancing the Occupational Commitment (OC) of retail employees in Vietnam. Retail companies are advised to focus on the following issues:

- Focus management on the IM factor, which has the strongest impact on OC, to promote commitment through a clear vision, goals, and the importance of the job for employees;
- IC needs to be strengthened through training, feedback, recognition, and development activities to

reduce turnover rates and enhance employee engagement;

- IIB and IIA demonstrate the effectiveness of building trust through ethical standards, fair management practices, and the exemplary role of the TL;

- IS needs to be implemented through practices, discussions with employees, and standardization of retail operations.

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