

The Unresolved Dilemma of Leadership-Commitment Relationship: A Proposed Framework

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Abstract

Numerous factors have been proposed to have influence over commitment to service quality; among some of those prominent factors are leadership styles that specifically include transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. However, among the prominent studies on the said relationship; the reported results are contradictory. Therefore, it is suggested to incorporate a moderating variable to further explain this relationship. Present study proposes role clarity as a moderating variable on the relationship between transformational, transactional, laissez-faire leadership styles and commitment to service quality.

Keywords: Leadership; Commitment; Relationship

Introduction

Commitment has been defined in service quality as “employees’ dedication to bring service quality and ready to give service beyond what is expected from them [1]. Similarly, according to Peccei and Rosenthal employees’ commitment to service quality “asserts efforts in employees’ jobs for the benefit of customers through ongoing improvement as a social action craven by affective, moral and altruistic motivation” [2]. Similarly, Ellinger [3] employee’s higher level of commitment gives direction to them for improving on commitment towards service [3]. Researchers have principally agreed that employees’ commitment leads towards improvements in service quality [4]. In the similar fashion, Schroder [5] stated that committed employees are devoted and organized; they work more than what a particular job requires. Also researchers have agreed that committed employee meet and even exceed requirement of service standards [6,7]. This notion is also supported by Varela and Garazo, stating that employees commitment towards service is vital as it affects positively the work and attitude towards work in a service organization [8].

Despite the fact that commitment to service quality is very critical in service organization, the existing body of literature indicates a lack of attention towards how commitment to service quality could be further improved. Along these lines, researchers in this domain have principally agreed that leadership could potentially influence employees commitment to service quality [9-11]. Specially, recommending the influence of transformational, transactional and laissez-faire styles of leadership over commitment to service quality.

Therefore, it is evident that commitment to service quality could be improved by effectively aligning the leadership styles; as a result it would potentially improve the organizational and attitudinal outcomes. Unfortunately, first, the research in this domain has been very limited. Secondly, the past research reports conflicting findings regarding the influence of leadership styles over commitment to service quality.

Therefore, this recommends the academic researchers to further look into the issue. Present study is an attempt to help researchers and practitioners to resolve this myth. The study will contribute in the existing body of knowledge as it addresses the knowledge gap between commitment to service quality and leadership styles. The next section presents the glimpses of the past research between the proposed relationships and therefore draws proposition.

Transformational leadership and commitment to service quality

This style of leadership enhances awareness of combined interest among the company's associates and helps them to accomplish their combined objectives [12-16]. Further stating these researchers have agreed that transformational leadership emphasize emotions and give appropriate importance to them; it also encourages creativity in employees and subordinates. Hence, this leadership-facet attempts to create emotional relationship with subordinates to motivate, encourage, and provide direction to them [17-19]. Additionally, above researchers have explained that transformational leadership helps employees understand that they are valuable resources of the organization; and this leadership style is found to have positive influence on employees’ task accomplishment.

Similarly, researchers have argued that transformational leadership has ability to influence the employee’s commitment to service quality Pahi et al. [20]. Correspondingly, while investigating the influence of transformational leadership on commitment to service quality in the Malaysian academic staff Mahmood et al. [9] found positive relationship between the two. In the same line, Clark, [1] suggested that transformational leadership influences commitment to service quality. Likewise, there are also studies that support the viewpoint that transformational leadership affects the subordinates’ commitment [21-24]. Apart from the above findings, however, the research also suggests mix results between the two [25-28].

Transactional leadership style and commitment to service quality

Beside, transformational leadership; the second identified leadership style is transactional. According to Burn, transactional

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leadership is the one who the leader who approaches subordinates for an exchange. Further stating Burns, stated that this leadership process is based on the exchange process between leaders and subordinates. This style encourages employees by fascinating them with rewards against performance [29,30]. Transactional leaders work well in a structured framework in organization where employees are fully accountable for the job allocated to them, irrespective of whether they have the capability or resources to perform the job [31]. According to Chzen, the service organizations are more formal and structural and subordinates are strictly supervised.

On the other hand, Emery and barker claimed that transactional leader encourages the subordinates towards commitment [21]. Transactional leadership similar to transformational leadership could influence the organizational outcomes [32], and the organizational commitment [21,33].

Researchers have provided empirical evidence with respect to positive association between transactional leadership and commitment to service quality [34-37]. On the other hand the literature also indicates a negative relationship between the two [25-28,38,39].

Laissez-faire leadership style and commitment to service quality

Interestingly, The Laissez-faire leadership style is characterized as non-leadership or the absence of leadership [40-43]. They further claimed that this kind of leadership always renounces their liability, delays decisions, gives no feedback and offers less attention to assist subordinates to fulfill their needs. Robbins et al. [44] and Luthans et al. [45] proposed similar explanation that laissez-faire style is “abdicates responsibilities to avoid making decision”. Bass et al. [46], argued that laissez-fair leadership style is considered as the “absence of leadership” in specific if there is neither an agreement nor transaction between the subordinates. Researcher further suggest that this style of leadership is considered as the most passive and least effective form of leadership behavior [47-49]. Hence, defending this kind of leadership style is very difficult unless the leader’s subordinates are someone who is an expert and well-motivated specialist such as scientists because according to Mondy et al. [50] and Humborstad et al. [51], laissez-faire leaders always let their group members in making all decisions. It is suggested that when subordinates are given total freedom in any field of work, the results will convert in low productivity and also it will affects the commitment [46]. On the contrary, researchers have suggested to laissez-faire leadership connects positively with employee commitment [36,52,53]. Moreover, empirical evidence provided in the studies suggests a mix relationship between laissez-faire style of leadership and commitment to service quality [54,55].

Role clarity as potential moderator

Role clarity refers to the degree to which employees receive and understand information that is needed for them to perform their jobs well [56]. Employee’s performance needs role clarity [57,58]. Role clarity represents the level to which workers get and comprehend information that is mandatory for them to execute their tasks well [56]. Role clarity and role ambiguity are used interchangeably in the literature and are thought to represent opposite ends of a continuum. In situations of high role clarity or low role ambiguity, employees understand what is expected of them in their job, and have knowledge on the available means to carry out their job tasks with in organization.

In contrast, in situations of low role clarity or high role ambiguity, employees lack an understanding of what is expected of them in their

jobs and what processes they should employ for goal attainment Newman, Allen et al. [59]. Ambiguous job contexts such as this, where employees have limited understanding in relation to core aspects of their job, have been shown to limit the capacities of employees to match appropriate behaviors with task specific role requirements resulting in lower levels of performance [60]. A lack of role clarity has also been shown to represent a situational stressor which can result in employees experiencing stress, tension, and anxiety as they struggle to understand the most effective and desired behaviors to engage in [61-63]. There is also substantial evidence linking lack of role clarity to job dissatisfaction and more negative emotions [62,64-69]. Evidence also indicates that situations of low role clarity tend to be viewed as hindering employees’ abilities to attain personal and professional goals leading to less positive work-related emotions and attitudes which are known predictors of deviant behavior [70-72].

Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that low role clarity is often interpreted by employees as a signal that their supervisor is either unwilling or unable to provide support [66]. Additionally, research evidence indicates that in contexts where subordinates feel they lack support from their supervisor and there message is not seen as genuine or credible, subordinates are less committed [73,74].

In situations of high role clarity subordinates perceive greater levels of support from their supervisor, with this in turn resulting in subordinates being more conscientious about carrying out their work responsibilities (feeling of being more committed towards organization and the work) [75,76].

Contingency theory supports that the effective leaders should provide role-clarity to their employees for attaining common organizational objectives [77-79]. Job context characteristics are, therefore, recognized as potentially important moderators in the relationship between leadership styles and follower behaviors [80]. Situations of low role clarity may indicate that there has been insufficient directive, task-oriented leadership to clarify subordinates’ performance goals, the means by which subordinates can effectively carry out tasks, and clarify standards against which subordinates’ performance will be judged. Since, it has been demonstrated that leader behavior is seen effective by subordinates to the extent that it facilitates their goal attainment [80], in job contexts where there are low levels of role clarity, a more task-oriented leadership style is required.

Our next line of reasoning for the proposed moderator results from evidence which suggests that the interactions between subordinates and supervisors’ behavior is critical for alleviating the unpredictability which subordinates feel about their job tasks [81]. Indeed, supervisors, as opposed to organizations more broadly, are likely to be the most important provider of role clarity, as many aspects of an employee’s role (goals, responsibilities, rules of conduct) are, to a large degree, determined by their supervisors [76,82]. Supervisors can also play a vital role in interpreting rules and procedures that may have been determined by the organization, and in doing so, reduce the levels of role ambiguity experienced by subordinates [81].

In situations where an employee perceives low levels of role clarity their supervisor has potentially failed to perform this important role [83]. Role clarity encourages the employees toward employee’s commitment [65]. Mukherjee et al. [84] also described that role clarity is more important variable as a moderator as compared to other variables. Similarly, Pahi and Kamal, have suggested role-clarity as a potential moderating variable for improving leadership and commitment to service quality relationship [20].

As a final argument we present the assertion of Baron et al. [85] who recommended that when the results between the predictor and outcomes variables are mixed or unexpectedly weak; a third variable could be introduced to explain the situation. Looking into the mixed results of the leadership styles and commitment to service quality, the present study proposes role-clarity as a potential moderating variable and following research framework is proposed.

Proposition: The role-clarity will moderate the relationship between transformational, transactional, laissez-faire leadership styles and commitment to service quality.

Proposed research framework

Based on pervious literature and empirical evidence indicating further need of research on the relationship between leadership styles and commitment to service quality, a proposed conceptual framework is provided in Figure 1.

In explaining the moderating effect of role clarity on the relationship between transformational, transactional, laissez-faire leadership style and commitment to service quality, this study proposes that leadership style do work in better manner with clear role of subordinates and it influences the employees toward commitment to service quality in this connection the path goal theory [79] provides clear support. Given the empirical support, it is proposed that the path-goal theory would provide empirical support for the moderating role of role-clarity on the relationship between transformation, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles and commitment to service quality relationship.

Literature Review

The leadership is about establishing a direction for prospective employees [86]; this direction helps employees to accomplish timely goals [87]. The leader possesses the ability to influence the subordinates [46]. Researchers have suggested that leadership in any form could influence the attitudes of employees towards work organization and could enhance their commitment towards work [1,21-24,88]. Hence it is assumed that organizations should pay equal attention towards leadership-commitment relationship. Specifically various leadership styles could be considered for enhancing employee commitment towards service quality. The following section presents a detailed view of transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles with commitment to service quality.

Conclusion

This paper has proposed the moderating effect of role clarity on the relationship between leadership styles and commitment to service quality, as shown in Figure 1. If the proposed framework is used to examine the moderating effect of role clarity on the relationship between leadership styles and commitment to service quality, the finding will provide a valuable contribution in two disciplines i.e.,

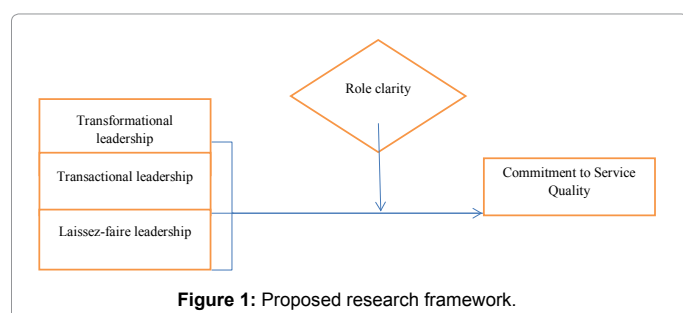


Figure 1: Proposed research framework.

organizational behavior and service quality management.

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