

Strengthening Organizational Commitment among Employees in Online Open Flexible Distance Learning Higher Education Institutions

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Abstracts

This study highlights the critical importance of employees' organizational commitment within online open distance learning institutions, addressing factors such as work engagement, perceived organizational support, and leadership style, with organizational trust serving as a mediating variable. The primary aim was to investigate both the direct and indirect effects of these factors on organizational commitment, recognizing that trust can play a pivotal intermediary role. Data were meticulously collected through a comprehensive review of existing literature, ensuring the selection of robust and valid measurement tools. Due to the absence of a complete population list, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted, and electronic surveys were distributed to selected participants. Out of 421 surveys distributed, 331 were collected, resulting in a high response rate of 78.6%. After further scrutiny, 317 surveys were deemed suitable for analysis. The data analysis was performed using SmartPLS4 software, renowned for its expertise in Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which provided a rigorous evaluation of the proposed hypotheses. The hypotheses testing results revealed significant positive effects of work engagement, perceived organizational support, and leadership style on organizational commitment, both directly and through organizational trust as a mediator. This underscores the intertwined relationships between these variables and highlights the importance of fostering a supportive and engaging work environment. The study suggests future research to explore the long-term impacts of leadership development,

cultural and regional variations in organizational support, and the effects of different types of work engagement. Additionally, future studies could investigate moderating variables such as organizational culture or individual differences to provide a more comprehensive understanding. These findings have practical implications for administrators and policymakers, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies to enhance leadership effectiveness, organizational support structures, and employee engagement, thereby fostering higher levels of trust and commitment.

Keywords: Work Engagement, Organizational Support, Leadership Style, Organizational Trust, Organizational Commitment.

Introduction

Employee commitment is crucial for Online Open Flexible Distance Learning Higher Education Institutions as it directly impacts the quality of education and student satisfaction (Chahar et al., 2021). Committed employees are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and dedicated to delivering high-quality educational experiences, despite the unique challenges of remote and flexible learning environments (Singh, 2022). Their loyalty and investment in the institution foster a stable and supportive learning atmosphere, essential for maintaining academic standards and promoting student retention and success (Abimbola et al., 2020). Furthermore, high employee commitment enhances institutional reputation, attracts top talent, and ensures continuous improvement and innovation necessary to remain competitive in the rapidly evolving field of distance education (Nguyen et al., 2022). Additionally, committed employees are better at adapting to technological advancements and implementing new teaching methodologies, which are vital for online education (Ahmad et al., 2020). They also contribute to creating a cohesive and collaborative work environment, which can lead to more effective problem-solving and better organizational outcomes (Amtu et al., 2021). By fostering a sense of belonging and purpose among employees, institutions can achieve higher levels of productivity and job satisfaction, ultimately leading to sustained growth and development (San-Martin et al., 2020). Employees' commitment in Online Open Flexible Distance Learning Higher Education Institutions poses a significant challenge due to the nature of remote work and the lack of physical interaction (Zumrah et al., 2021). The absence of face-to-face engagement can lead to feelings of isolation and detachment, reducing employees' emotional connection to the institution (Ngirande, 2021). Additionally, the flexibility inherent in these institutions might blur boundaries between work and personal life, contributing to burnout and decreased motivation (Joarder et al., 2020). The rapidly changing technological landscape also requires constant adaptation and learning, which can be overwhelming without adequate support (Osman et al., 2018). Consequently, these factors can lead to lower levels of commitment, affecting the quality of education and student satisfaction (Muleya et al., 2022). The significance of studying the relationships between work engagement, organizational support, leadership style, organizational trust, and employee commitment in Online Open Flexible Distance Learning Higher Education Institutions is profound for several stakeholders (Kebah et al., 2019). For policymakers, this research provides insights into creating supportive policies that enhance work engagement and trust, ultimately boosting employee commitment and institutional effectiveness (kebah et al. 2019). Institutions themselves can benefit by understanding the critical role of leadership and organizational support in fostering a committed workforce, leading to improved educational quality and innovation. Employees gain from a supportive work environment that prioritizes their engagement and well-being, reducing burnout and increasing job satisfaction (N

Wikneswary et al., 2024). For students, the implications are equally vital; committed and engaged educators are more likely to deliver high-quality, consistent education, improving student satisfaction and academic outcomes (Li et al., 2020). This study focuses on evaluating the direct and indirect relationships between work engagement, organizational support, leadership style, and organizational commitment with organizational trust as a mediator among employees in online open flexible distance learning higher education institutions.

Literature Review

Underpinning Theory

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) is a robust underpinning theory for examining the direct and indirect relationships between work engagement, organizational support, leadership style, and employee commitment, with organizational trust as a mediator. This model comprehensively addresses how balancing job demands and resources impacts employee well-being and organizational outcomes. Within the JD-R framework, job resources such as organizational support and transformational leadership are crucial elements that foster work engagement. These resources provide employees with the necessary support, autonomy, and feedback to thrive in their roles, leading to increased energy, dedication, and absorption in their work. Consequently, high levels of work engagement positively influence organizational trust, as engaged employees are more likely to perceive their organization as supportive and trustworthy (Demerouti et al., 2001). Organizational trust, in turn, enhances employee commitment by creating a sense of security and loyalty. The JD-R Model also highlights the mediating role of organizational trust in the relationship between work engagement and employee commitment. As employees experience higher engagement due to ample job resources, their trust in the organization strengthens, which further solidifies their commitment. This cascading effect underscores the importance of nurturing job resources to cultivate a committed workforce (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). By employing the JD-R Model, this study gains a theoretical foundation that captures the dynamic interplay between work engagement, organizational support, leadership style, and employee commitment and emphasizes the critical role of organizational trust in mediating these relationships. This approach provides valuable insights into how organizations can strategically enhance employee commitment through targeted interventions that bolster work engagement and trust.

Relationship between Leadership Style, Organizational Trust & Organizational Commitment

Leadership style significantly influences the level of commitment employees feel toward their organization (Aruoren & Tarurhor, 2023). Transformational leadership, characterized by inspiration, motivation, and support, tends to foster higher levels of organizational commitment compared to transactional leadership, which focuses more on tasks and rewards (Lee et al., 2022). However, the presence of organizational trust can amplify or mitigate these effects. When employees trust their leaders, they are more likely to be committed to the organization, as trust fosters a sense of security and belonging (Ismail et al., 2020). This trust is built through consistent, transparent, and fair leadership practices. As a mediator, organizational trust bridges the gap between leadership style and organizational commitment by ensuring that the leadership efforts are perceived positively and are aligned with the employees' values and expectations (Mansor et al., 2021). Leaders who build trust by being reliable, honest, and supportive enhance their influence on organizational commitment. This, in turn, results in employees who are more dedicated, satisfied, and willing to go above and

beyond in their roles (Yuan et al., 2021). Therefore, cultivating a leadership style that prioritizes trust-building is essential for fostering strong organizational commitment and achieving long-term organizational success (Alazmi & Alenezi, 2023). Hence, the following hypotheses were proposed for this study:

H1: There is a relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment among employees in online open flexible distance-learning higher education institutions.

H2: There is a relationship between leadership style and organizational trust in the organizational commitment among employees in online open flexible distance-learning higher education institutions.

H3: There is a mediating effect of organizational trust on the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment among employees in online open flexible distance-learning higher education institutions.

Relationship between Organizational Support, Organizational Trust & Organizational Commitment

Organizational support, which includes providing resources, recognizing employee contributions, and showing genuine concern for employee well-being, plays a crucial role in fostering organizational commitment (Baykal, 2020). When employees perceive high levels of support from their organization, they are more likely to develop a strong emotional attachment and loyalty to the organization. However, the impact of organizational support on commitment is significantly enhanced by the presence of organizational trust (Shateri & Hayat, 2020). Trust acts as a crucial mediator that transforms supportive actions into genuine commitment. When employees trust that their organization has their best interests at heart, the support they receive is perceived as sincere and more meaningful (Utomo et al., 2023). This trust is built through consistent, fair, and transparent organizational practices. Without trust, even well-intentioned support might be viewed with skepticism, reducing its effectiveness in fostering commitment (Ha & Lee, 2022). Therefore, organizational trust strengthens the relationship between support and commitment by ensuring that employees feel valued and confident in the organization's intentions (Bozdoğan & Aksoy, 2020). This leads to higher levels of organizational commitment, characterized by increased employee engagement, job satisfaction, and a willingness to contribute to the organization's success (Alharbi & Abuelhassan, 2020). Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed for this study:

H4: There is a relationship between organizational support and organizational Commitment among employees in online open flexible distance-learning higher education institutions.

H5: There is a relationship between organizational support and organizational trust in The organizational commitment among employees in online open flexible distance-learning higher education institutions.

H6: There is a mediating effect of organizational trust on the relationship between

organizational support and organizational commitment among employees in online open flexible distance-learning higher education institutions.

Relationship between Work Engagement, Organizational Trust & Organizational Commitment

The relationship between work engagement and organizational commitment is pivotal in understanding how employees' dedication and enthusiasm towards their work translate into loyalty and a long-term association with the organization, with organizational trust acting as a crucial mediator (Gomez et al., 2022). Work engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, leads to higher levels of organizational commitment as engaged employees are more emotionally and intellectually invested in their work (Ha & Lee, 2022). This investment fosters a stronger attachment to the organization. However, the role of organizational trust is critical in mediating this relationship. Trust ensures that the energy and dedication employees invest in their work are reciprocated with fairness, support, and transparency from the organization (Orgambidez & Almeida, 2020). When employees trust their organization, they feel secure and valued, which enhances their engagement and solidifies their commitment. Trust bridges the gap by ensuring that the positive effects of work engagement are fully realized in the form of organizational commitment (Khan et al., 2022). Without trust, even highly engaged employees might not fully commit to the organization if they fear their efforts are unrecognized or undervalued (Nguyen et al., 2020). Therefore, fostering organizational trust is essential to maximize the impact of work engagement on organizational commitment, leading to a more motivated, loyal, and productive workforce that drives organizational success (Silva et al., 2023). Thus, the following hypotheses were proposed for this study:

H7: There is a relationship between work engagement and organizational commitment among employees in online open flexible distance-learning higher education institutions.

H8: There is a relationship between work engagement and organizational trust in the organizational commitment among employees in online open flexible distance-learning higher education institutions.

H9: There is a relationship between organizational trust and organizational commitment among employees in online open flexible distance-learning higher education institutions.

H10: There is a mediating effect of work engagement on the relationship between organizational support and organizational commitment among employees in online open flexible distance-learning higher education institutions.

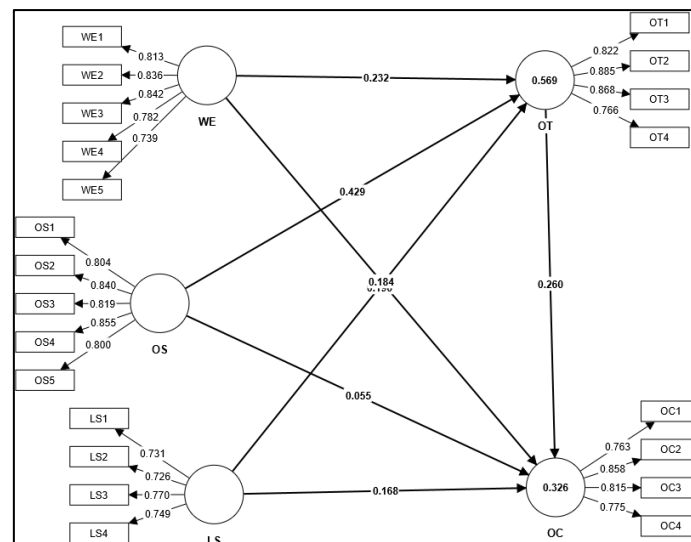


Figure 1: Research Model

Note: WE=Work Engagement OS=Organizational Support LS=Leadership Style
 OT=Organizational Trust OC=Organizational Commitment

Methodology

This research delved into the intricate web of factors influencing employee well-being and loyalty within online open distance learning institutions, with organizational trust serving as a crucial intermediary. The study meticulously examined both the direct and indirect effects of work engagement, perceived organizational support, leadership style, and organizational commitment, with organizational trust positioned as the mediating variable. To ensure the quality of the data, researchers meticulously curated primary data through a comprehensive review of existing literature. This review process ensured the selection of reliable and valid measurement tools to capture the various constructs. Due to the absence of a complete population list, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants. Electronic surveys were then distributed to these chosen individuals. The analysis meticulously scrutinized 22 observed variables, categorized as follows: independent variables - work engagement (5 items), organizational support (5 items), and leadership style (4 items); the mediating variable - organizational trust (4 items); and the dependent variable - organizational commitment (4 items). Respondents utilized a five-point Likert scale to evaluate the elements within each construct, contributing to a robust and comprehensive dataset. The high response rate, with 331 out of 421 surveys collected (translating to a satisfactory response rate of 78.6%), justified the use of structural equation modeling (SEM) for data analysis. However, after further scrutiny, only 317 surveys were deemed suitable for further analysis. For data analysis and hypothesis testing, Smartpls4 software was chosen due to its well-established reputation for expertise in SEM techniques (Ringle et al., 2022). The software's robust assessment capabilities and proficiency in handling complex multivariate data analysis perfectly aligned with the study's objectives and adhered to the recommendations outlined by Ringle et al. (2022). Smartpls4 facilitated a rigorous evaluation of the proposed hypotheses and conducted extensive multivariate data analysis, enabling a comprehensive assessment of both the measurement and structural models employed in the study.

Data Analysis

Respondent Profiles

Females make up a larger portion of the sample (60.9%) compared to males (39.1%). In terms of age, the most prominent group falls within the 30-40-year-old range (45.1%), followed by 40-50-year-olds (23.0%) and 50-60-year-olds (17.4%). The younger demographics (20-30 years old) and those over 60 are less represented, accounting for 7.9% and 6.6% respectively. Work experience also exhibits a specific pattern. The most frequent category lies between 5-10 years (22.7%), closely trailed by those with less than 5 years (12.6%) and 10-15 years (18.0%). As experience increases, the frequency appears to decrease, with categories like 15-20 years (13.2%), 20-25 years (12.0%), 25-30 years (12.9%), and over 30 years (8.5%) having progressively lower representation. Interestingly, the data suggests a near-equal split regarding positions within the institution. Academicians make up 47.6% of the sample, while non-academicians contribute 52.4%.

Common Method Bias

To mitigate potential biases arising from common measurement methods, this study adopted a comprehensive collinearity assessment approach introduced by Kock (2015) and Kock & Lynn (2012). This method simultaneously addresses both vertical and horizontal collinearity issues within the data (Kock & Lynn, 2012). A key indicator for identifying problematic collinearity is the variance inflation factor (VIF). Values exceeding 3.3 suggest a potential concern for common method bias impacting the model's results (Kock & Lynn, 2012). Conversely, VIFs below 3.3, as observed in Table 1, imply that the model is unlikely to be affected by common method bias (Kock, 2015). This analysis confirms the absence of such bias within the current model.

Table 1

Full Collinearity Test

	OC	OT	WE	OS	LS
OC		1.473	1.529	1.550	1.511
OT	2.229		2.272	2.068	2.292
WE	2.521	2.475		1.977	2.515
OS	2.901	2.558	2.245		2.817
LS	1.642	1.646	1.658	1.635	

Measurement Model

In this study, we employed the methodology advised by Hair et al. (2017) to evaluate each measurement at both the first and second order, which helped us identify items with loadings below the 0.7 threshold. The analysis of construct reliability and validity revealed that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs ranged between 0.645 and 0.700, which surpasses the 0.5 benchmark, hence demonstrating well-established convergent validity (Hair et al., 2017) (refer to Table 2). Moreover, the composite reliability for all constructs was above 0.7, specifically ranging from 0.734 to 0.883. Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs were also greater than 0.7, ranging from 0.733 to 0.882 (see Table 2). To confirm discriminant validity, we first evaluated cross-loadings to ensure accurate representation and measurement of respective constructs (detailed in Table 3). Next, we utilized the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio for further validation, following the recommended criteria for discriminant validity in Variance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (VB-SEM) as outlined by

Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015). Table 4 displayed the HTMT ratios, original sample, and 95% confidence intervals, confirming adherence to the HTMT threshold of 0.85.

Table 2

Construct Reliability & Validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CA	CR	AVE
Leadership Style	LS1	0.731	0.733	0.734	0.554
	LS2	0.726			
	LS3	0.770			
	LS4	0.749			
Organizational Commitment	OC1	0.763	0.817	0.823	0.646
	OC2	0.858			
	OC3	0.815			
	OC4	0.775			
Organizational Support	OS1	0.804	0.882	0.883	0.679
	OS2	0.840			
	OS3	0.819			
	OS4	0.855			
	OS5	0.800			
Organizational Trust	OT1	0.822	0.856	0.863	0.700
	OT2	0.885			
	OT3	0.868			
	OT4	0.766			
Work Engagement	WE1	0.813	0.862	0.863	0.645
	WE2	0.836			
	WE3	0.842			
	WE4	0.782			
	WE5	0.739			

Notes: CA=Cronbach Alpha CR=Composite Reliability AVE=Average Variance Extracted

Table 3

Hetrotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratios

	LS	OC	OS	OT
OC	0.572			
OS	0.722	0.554		
OT	0.710	0.607	0.817	
WE	0.693	0.578	0.859	0.765

Structural Model

In this research, the structural model evaluation followed the methodology set forth by Hair et al. (2017), which involved a detailed analysis of pathway coefficients (β) and coefficients of determination (R^2). We employed the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method, utilizing 5000 sub-samples to assess the significance of path coefficients. The results from hypothesis testing, including confidence intervals, path coefficients (beta), corresponding t-statistics, and p-values, are comprehensively detailed in Table 5. This thorough analysis delivers critical insights into the significance and robustness of the relationships among variables in the structural model. The detailed presentation of the hypothesis testing results in Table 4 offers

an in-depth analysis of each hypothesis, showcasing Beta coefficients, T-statistics, P-values, and the final decisions regarding hypothesis support. This approach significantly enhances the depth and clarity of the study's findings, providing a richer understanding of the interactions between the variables under investigation.

The hypothesis testing results in Table 4 provide a detailed analysis of the relationships examined in this study. Hypothesis *H1* posited that leadership style significantly influences organizational commitment, which is supported by a beta coefficient (β) of 0.168, a t-statistic of 2.755, and a p-value of 0.006, leading to its acceptance. This indicates a positive and statistically significant impact of leadership style on organizational commitment. Similarly, *H2* proposed that leadership style affects organizational trust, evidenced by a β of 0.190, a t-statistic of 3.659, and a p-value of 0.000, thus accepted, showing leadership style's considerable influence on fostering trust within the organization. For *H3*, which examined the mediating role of organizational trust between leadership style and organizational commitment, the results show a β of 0.049, a t-statistic of 2.366, and a p-value of 0.018, affirming the hypothesis. This indicates that while the indirect effect is smaller, it is still significant, suggesting that trust partially mediates the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment.

On the other hand, *H4*, which examined the impact of organizational support on organizational commitment, was rejected with a β of 0.055, a t-statistic of 0.588, and a p-value of 0.556. This suggests that organizational support does not have a significant direct effect on organizational commitment. In contrast, *H5*, which tested the direct effect of organizational support on organizational trust, was accepted, with a β of 0.429, a t-statistic of 6.914, and a p-value of 0.000, highlighting a strong and significant positive effect of organizational support on trust. Following this, *H6*, which looked at the mediating role of organizational trust between organizational support and organizational commitment, was also accepted ($\beta = 0.112$, t-statistic = 2.882, and p-value = 0.004), suggesting that while support might not directly influence commitment, it does so indirectly through trust.

For *H7*, the impact of work engagement on organizational commitment, the hypothesis was accepted, with a β of 0.184, a t-statistic of 2.436, and a p-value of 0.015, demonstrating a positive and significant effect. Likewise, *H8* asserted that work engagement influences organizational trust, supported by a β of 0.232, a t-statistic of 3.900, and a p-value of 0.000, leading to its acceptance. This shows that increased work engagement significantly enhances organizational trust. *H9* proposed the direct impact of organizational trust on organizational commitment, accepted with a β of 0.260, a t-statistic of 3.365, and a p-value of 0.001, establishing organizational trust as a substantial predictor of commitment. Finally, *H10* examined the mediating role of organizational trust between work engagement and organizational commitment, and with a β of 0.060, a t-statistic of 2.769, and a p-value of 0.006, this hypothesis was accepted. This confirms that while work engagement directly impacts organizational commitment, it also exerts an additional indirect effect through the enhancement of organizational trust.

Table 4

Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypotheses	Beta	T statistics	P values	2.50%	97.50%	Decision
H1: LS -> OC	0.168	2.755	0.006	0.041	0.282	<i>Accepted</i>
H2: LS -> OT	0.190	3.659	0.000	0.089	0.293	<i>Accepted</i>
H3: LS -> OT -> OC	0.049	2.366	0.018	0.017	0.102	<i>Accepted</i>
H4: OS -> OC	0.055	0.588	0.556	-0.135	0.229	<i>Rejected</i>
H5: OS -> OT	0.429	6.914	0.000	0.303	0.546	<i>Accepted</i>
H6: OS -> OT -> OC	0.112	2.882	0.004	0.045	0.199	<i>Accepted</i>
H7: WE -> OC	0.184	2.436	0.015	0.025	0.323	<i>Accepted</i>
H8: WE -> OT	0.232	3.900	0.000	0.115	0.349	<i>Accepted</i>
H9: OT -> OC	0.260	3.365	0.001	0.105	0.410	<i>Accepted</i>
H10: WE -> OT -> OC	0.060	2.769	0.006	0.026	0.117	<i>Accepted</i>

Note: Significance level $p < 0.05$

Table 5 offers a detailed summary of effect sizes (f^2), assessed according to Cohen's guidelines (1992), which classify them as small (0.020 to 0.150), medium (0.150 to 0.350), or large (0.350 or above). The observed effect sizes ranged from 0.001 (small) to 0.169 (large), highlighting the varied influence of the analyzed variables. Additionally, the Intrinsic Value Inflation Factor (VIF) values provided in Table 6 remained consistently below the more lenient threshold of 5, with the highest VIF recorded at 2.963. This indicates a low level of collinearity, ensuring reliable comparisons of effect sizes and interpretations of coefficients within the structural model. Notably, a significant degree of explained variance for the endogenous construct is demonstrated by an R^2 value of 0.326 (Figure 1). Furthermore, the model effectively explains about 56.9% of the variance in the mediator, as indicated by an R^2 value of 0.569, underscoring the model's proficiency in capturing the essential dynamics of the mediation process.

Table 5

Effect Sizes(f^2) & Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Constructs	f^2		VIF	
	OC	OT	OC	OT
LS	0.025	0.052	1.683	1.599
OS	0.001	0.169	2.963	2.535
OT	0.043		2.320	
WE	0.020	0.052	2.526	2.401

The evaluation of the model's inference and managerial implications was subject to rigorous out-of-sample predictive analysis using the PLSpredict method, as recommended by Shmueli et al. (2016, 2019). As illustrated in Table 6, the application of PLS-SEM consistently produced superior Q^2 predictions (greater than 0) compared to naive mean predictions, with lower Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) values than those of linear model (LM) benchmarks, demonstrating its robust predictive capabilities. Remarkably, in all eight instances, the RMSE values for PLS-SEM predictions were consistently lower than those for the linear model (LM) predictions, emphasizing the predictive strength of the proposed model as shown in Table 6. The introduction of the Cross-Validated Predictive Ability Test (CVPAT) by Hair et al. (2022) and its integration with PLSpredict analysis by Liengard et al. (2021) signify substantial

advancements in predictive modeling methodologies. Moreover, Table 7 reaffirms the superior predictive capabilities of PLS-SEM, evidenced by lower average loss values compared to indicator averages and LM benchmarks, thereby providing strong evidence of its enhanced predictive performance.

Table 6
PLSpredicts

Items	Q ² predict	PLS-RMSE	LM-RMSE	PLS-LM
OC1	0.138	0.764	0.779	-0.015
OC2	0.193	0.736	0.748	-0.012
OC3	0.160	0.759	0.773	-0.014
OC4	0.217	0.633	0.648	-0.015
OT1	0.408	0.448	0.452	-0.004
OT2	0.443	0.532	0.543	-0.011
OT3	0.432	0.479	0.484	-0.005
OT4	0.272	0.710	0.714	-0.004

Table 7
Cross Validated Predictive Ability Test (CVPAT)

	Average loss difference	t-value	p-value
OC	-0.111	4.316	0.000
OT	-0.182	6.473	0.000
Overall	-0.146	6.526	0.000

Ringle and Sarstedt (2016) along with Hair et al. (2018) introduced Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) to evaluate the significance and effectiveness of latent variables in explaining acceptance, as elaborated in Table 8. The overall impact on organizational commitment was most pronounced for organizational trust (0.260), followed by work engagement (0.245), leadership style (0.217), and organizational support (0.166), highlighting their relative importance in organizational commitment. Organizational support scored the highest (70.133), while organizational trust had the lowest score (60.959) on a 0-100 scale, indicating better performance for organizational support and lower achievement for organizational trust. Despite ranking first in leader organizational commitment importance, organizational trust displayed the lowest performance. These findings suggest prioritizing strategies to enhance organizational trust among employees, potentially improving the overall organizational commitment of employees in open online flexible distance learning higher education institutions.

Table 8
Importance -Performance Map Analysis (IPMA)

	Total Effect	Performance
LS	0.217	64.952
OS	0.166	70.133
OT	0.260	60.959
WE	0.245	63.403

Discussion & Conclusion

Discussion

To ensure the enhancement of work engagement, leadership style, and organizational support, open online flexible distance learning higher education institutions should adopt a multi-faceted strategic approach that holistically addresses these critical factors. Firstly, fostering a culture of continuous professional development and training is vital. Institutions can implement comprehensive training programs that not only enhance the faculty and staff's teaching and technical skills but also promote a collaborative and engaging work environment (Muleya et al., 2022). Such programs should emphasize the importance of work-life balance, which is particularly pertinent in a flexible learning context, to prevent burnout and maintain high levels of engagement. Statistical analysis supports this, as work engagement was found to have a significant positive effect on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.184$, t-statistic = 2.436, $p = 0.015$) and organizational trust ($\beta = 0.232$, t-statistic = 3.900, $p = 0.000$). Secondly, leadership within these institutions should be adaptive, inclusive, and transformational, focusing on building trust and inspiring their teams. Leaders should actively communicate a clear vision, set transparent goals, and recognize and reward employees' contributions. This approach not only cultivates trust but also aligns individual efforts with organizational objectives. Analysis shows that leadership style significantly impacts both organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.168$, t-statistic = 2.755, $p = 0.006$) and organizational trust ($\beta = 0.190$, t-statistic = 3.659, $p = 0.000$). Additionally, leadership development programs that equip current and aspiring leaders with the skills to manage remote teams effectively are essential (Mansor et al., 2021). Thirdly, robust organizational support mechanisms should be established. This includes providing accessible resources, creating a responsive and understanding HR department, and ensuring a supportive environment that acknowledges the unique challenges of distance learning. Flexible working policies, mental health support, and a platform for open communication where employees feel heard and valued can significantly enhance organizational support, as shown by the significant impact of organizational support on organizational trust ($\beta = 0.429$, t-statistic = 6.914, $p = 0.000$). Moreover, creating opportunities for social interaction, even in a virtual setting, can help build a sense of community and belonging among employees (Lee et al., 2022). With organizational trust identified as a crucial mediator, these strategies collectively foster an environment where employees feel supported, valued, and engaged. Consequently, this leads to increased organizational commitment as employees are more likely to remain loyal and dedicated to an institution that demonstrates genuine care and commitment to their personal and professional growth, supported by the significant indirect effects seen in the relationships mediated by organizational trust, such as organizational support to organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.112$, t-statistic = 2.882, $p = 0.004$) and work engagement to organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.060$, t-statistic = 2.769, $p = 0.006$).

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of this study are intricately aligned with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, as articulated by Bakker and Demerouti (2017). This model posits that job demands and resources are critical determinants of employee well-being and performance. Our findings substantiate and expand upon this theory by elucidating the pivotal role of leadership style, organizational support, and work engagement as essential job resources that significantly contribute to enhancing organizational commitment, with organizational trust functioning as a vital mediator. Firstly, the study underscores the

importance of effective leadership styles in fostering a trust-based work environment. Transformational and inclusive leadership not only motivates employees but also builds a foundation of trust, which in turn enhances their commitment to the organization. This supports the JD-R Model's assertion that job resources can counterbalance job demands and catalyze motivational processes within the workplace. Secondly, organizational support is highlighted as a crucial resource that impacts organizational trust and, subsequently, commitment. By providing accessible resources, supportive HR policies, and fostering a communicative atmosphere, institutions can create a supportive environment that mitigates job stressors. This aligns with the JD-R Model by emphasizing that strong organizational support enhances employee engagement and well-being, leading to improved organizational outcomes. Thirdly, work engagement emerges as a significant factor influencing employees' trust in the organization and their overall commitment. Engaged employees are more likely to feel valued, supported, and committed, which reinforces the JD-R Model's perspective that engagement acts as a resource that drives positive organizational behavior and outcomes. Moreover, the mediating role of organizational trust is a critical insight from this study. It demonstrates that trust not only directly affects organizational commitment but also amplifies the positive impact of leadership style, organizational support, and work engagement. This nuance adds depth to the JD-R Model, highlighting the importance of trust as a central element in the dynamics of job resources and organizational outcomes.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this study are profound, offering actionable insights for administrators and policymakers in open online flexible distance learning higher education institutions. Firstly, the study highlights the critical role of effective leadership in fostering organizational commitment (Ha & Lee, 2022). Administrators should invest in leadership development programs that promote transformational and inclusive leadership styles, which have the potential to build trust and enhance employee commitment. Secondly, the importance of organizational support cannot be overstated. Institutions should develop comprehensive support systems that include accessible resources, flexible working policies, responsive HR practices, and robust mental health support (Nguyen et al., 2022). By creating an environment where employees feel genuinely supported, institutions can significantly enhance organizational trust and commitment, ultimately improving employee retention and performance (Amtu et al., 2021). Thirdly, fostering work engagement is essential. Implementing programs that encourage active participation, professional growth, and recognition of achievements can increase employees' engagement levels. These programs should also emphasize maintaining a healthy work-life balance to prevent burnout and promote sustained engagement (Baykal, 2020). Moreover, the study underscores the mediating role of organizational trust. Building and maintaining trust through transparent communication, consistent recognition of contributions, and establishing a culture of accountability can significantly amplify the positive effects of leadership style, organizational support, and work engagement on organizational commitment.

Suggestions for Future Study

Future studies could delve deeper into several key areas based on the findings of this study to further enrich the understanding of organizational dynamics in open online flexible distance-learning higher education institutions. Firstly, researchers could explore the long-term effects of leadership development programs on organizational trust and commitment

to assess sustainability and impact over time. Secondly, further investigation into the role of organizational support in diverse cultural and regional contexts could provide a more nuanced understanding of its impact and efficacy. Additionally, future research could examine the interplay between various types of work engagement (e.g., emotional, cognitive, physical) and organizational outcomes to identify the most influential forms of engagement in different job roles. Moreover, studies could investigate potential moderating variables, such as organizational culture or individual differences, that might influence the relationships between leadership style, organizational support, work engagement, and organizational trust. Examining these variables could offer a more comprehensive framework for understanding and improving organizational commitment. Lastly, leveraging qualitative methodologies, such as interviews and focus groups, could provide rich, in-depth insights into employee experiences and perceptions, complementing quantitative data and uncovering underlying mechanisms driving trust and commitment. These suggestions would contribute to a more holistic and actionable understanding of enhancing organizational commitment in the evolving landscape of distance learning.

Conclusion

This study underscores the pivotal roles of leadership style, organizational support, and work engagement in fostering organizational commitment within open online flexible distance-learning higher education institutions. The mediating role of organizational trust is particularly significant, enhancing the positive impacts of these factors on commitment. Practical strategies include investing in leadership development, providing robust organizational support, and promoting work engagement. Future research should explore the long-term impacts, cultural contexts, types of engagement, and potential moderating variables to further deepen understanding. Collectively, these insights offer a comprehensive framework for enhancing employee commitment and organizational performance.

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