

The Mediating Effect of Transformational Leadership in The Relationship Between Distributive Justice and Affective Commitment

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Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between distributive justice, affective commitment, and transformational leadership, focusing on transformational leadership as a mediating variable among leaders at Maktab Rendah Sains MARA (MRSM) in Malaysia. Leaders play a crucial role in shaping distributive justice within organizations, particularly in addressing challenges such as unequal task distribution and ensuring 'equal rights' and 'balanced workloads.' Addressing these issues is critical for maintaining organizational performance, morale, and commitment. Resolve these inequalities to ensure quality standards, requiring leaders to demonstrate exceptional commitment and capabilities beyond existing job roles. Given its potential for positive and negative organizational outcomes, transformational leadership is a critical area of exploration within the educational and organizational context. The study develops and tests a conceptual framework and hypotheses, examining the predominant leadership style of MRSM leaders and its effect on organizational outcomes. A quantitative approach was applied, utilizing an online questionnaire to collect data from a population of 463 MRSM leaders with a sample size of 210 respondents. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation across job positions, including principal, vice principal, and head of departments. The results reveal that transformational leadership functions as a mediator and fully mediates, amplifying the effect of distributive justice and underscoring the importance of leadership style in fostering affective commitment in MRSM.

Keywords: Organization, Transformational Leadership, Distributive Justice, Affective Commitment.

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INTRODUCTION

Maktab Rendah Sains MARA (MRSM) is under the Education and Secondary Division, aiming to develop Bumiputra students' potential in science and technology (Mohamad, 2017). Initially exclusive. These colleges are vital in providing secondary education in science and technology to intellectually gifted Bumiputras, favoring low-income and rural applicants (Hassan et al., 2020) and students (Johari et al., 2023). The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Bakar,

2023) and MARA Gateway To Holistic Education 2021 - 2025 (Majlis Amanah Rakyat MARA, 2021a) emphasize school leadership's role in student achievement, making it a focus for MRSMs. Hence, this has raised the interest in exploring effective leadership (Razali et al., 2024) in MRSM organizations.

Literature Review

Distributive justice relates to the fairness of decision outcomes and resource distribution. It includes tangible assets like salaries and intangible assets like recognition and promotion opportunities (Ibrahim et al., 2022). The concept is based on the belief that resources should be allocated equitably, guided by equity, rewards based on contributions, equality, uniform compensation, and benefits according to individual requirements (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2020). Its primary aim is to ensure fair allocation of resources and opportunities within society, considering factors like wealth and social status.

Distributive justice ultimately encompasses perceived equity in allocating benefits and responsibilities among group members (Ibrahim et al., 2022). Situations where certain employees work longer hours but earn the same wages can fail to achieve distributive justice. People frequently reference the behavioral standards within their group to evaluate distributive justice, believing justice is achieved when these accepted norms distribute rewards and burdens.

Affective commitment is the initial component of organizational commitment, indicating an individual's emotional connection and wish to remain with the organization. It is crucial in nurturing positive feelings and forming robust relationships (Kim & Beehr, 2020). The level of this commitment relies on how well the individual's needs coincide with their experiences within the organization. Researchers characterize affective commitment as emotional connections, a feeling of belonging, and involvement in reaching organizational objectives (Al-Jabari & Ghazzawi, 2019). It is grounded in the belief in the organization's values and goals, a wish to contribute, and the intention to stay as a member.

Additionally, affective commitment is shaped by various factors, such as challenging job roles, clarity in defining responsibilities and objectives, the experience of being respected by management, strong cohesion among colleagues, and providing constructive feedback (Al-Jabari & Ghazzawi, 2019). Ultimately, it embodies an emotional connection and the resolve to remain committed to the organization (Kim & Beehr, 2020), driven by the ongoing alignment of organizational goals, objectives, and values with the satisfaction of individual needs.

The transformational leadership approach originates from the term "transform," which signifies a change in nature, form, and appearance. Leaders employing this style convert their followers into motivated, innovative, and committed individuals who align with the objectives of their organizations (Deng et al., 2023). This style of leadership fosters positive change among followers. It emphasizes "transforming" followers to support one another, promote cooperation, encourage harmony, and engage with the organization (Northouse, 2021). Transformational leadership is a significant contemporary style that has been extensively researched over recent decades. It contrasts with the transactional leadership style, which, according to most studies (Northouse, 2021), is perceived as a mutual exchange where leaders gain higher or expected performance from followers, who receive rewards and recognition (Purwanto, 2020a; 2020b).

Transformational leadership may expand followers' (Nguyen, 2020; Bakker et al., 2023; Den Hartog, 2023) portfolios of needs, transform followers' self-interest, increase their confidence, elevate their expectations, encourage behavioral change, motivate others to reach a higher level of personal achievement (Bakker et al., 2023) and heighten the leaders' intended outcomes

value. The transformational leadership style is not due to charisma; it is a behavioral process capable of being learned (Deng et al., 2023). The transformational leadership style benefits organizations aiming to drive innovation in a competitive environment (Northouse, 2021). This approach emphasizes creating a compelling vision and motivating team members to pursue it actively. Transformational leaders enhance followers' morale, motivation, and ethical standards (Northouse, 2021).

Research shows that transformational leadership positively impacts followers, promoting support, encouragement, and a unified focus on organizational goals (Nguyen, 2020; Bakker et al., 2023; Den Hartog, 2023). It fosters supportive, motivating, and innovative qualities, contributing positively to employee performance and organizational effectiveness without adding burdens. Numerous studies link transformational leadership to higher employee performance and job satisfaction, similar to transactional leadership (Ly, 2024; Bakker et al., 2023). This style has shown greater effectiveness across various sectors, such as business, military, and healthcare, and aligns with the traits of an ideal leader. Transformational leaders often serve as role models for their subordinates, encouraging them to adopt similar behaviors (Northouse, 2021).

Problem Statement

Highlight the significant effect of MRSM leadership on achievements and the importance of the leadership style in shaping the organization's outcomes. Leaders make the most errors in leading the organization. These errors include offensive supervision (Smollan, 2024), excessively pressuring subordinates, or acting self-centered (Almeida et al., 2023). However, learning from leadership errors is essential to avoid career setbacks and prevent organizational impairment.

Furthermore, leadership failures encourage individuals to reflect on their actions by recognizing and analyzing their errors. This will promote both personal and professional development and avoid similar errors. This will enhance (Shafiee, 2021) and support the organization's success (Almeida et al., 2023).

However, leaders face crucial challenges in shaping distributive justice within organizations, such as unequal workload task distribution. Addressing 'equal rights' and 'equal balance' (Tinay et al., 2024) in workload (Omar et al., 2021) is critical for maintaining organizational performance (Smollan, 2024) and morale to commitment (Khan et al., 2023) can significantly affect distributive justice. Leaders learn from their errors and use these lessons to educate others, enhancing collective knowledge and resilience.

If these issues are not resolved, they could threaten the goal of achieving quality standards. Equality issues (Tinay et al., 2024) require leaders to demonstrate extraordinary commitment and capability to extend beyond traditional job roles (Darus et al., 2024). Consequently, this research explores the challenges surrounding distributive justice, transformational leadership, and affective commitment, striving to identify and clarify the relevant variables for effectively addressing these critical issues.

Research Objective and Significance

This research examines transformational leadership to achieve specific objectives and addresses research inquiries on defining distributive justice and its influence on affective commitment. Additionally, it seeks to assess the potential mediating effect of transformational leadership in the relationship between distributive justice and affective commitment among leaders in MRSM.

1. To investigate the relationship between distributive justice and affective commitment among MRSM leaders.
2. To examine the mediating effect of transformational leadership on distributive justice and affective commitment among MRSM leaders.

This research enhances our knowledge of distributive justice, affective commitment, and transformational leadership at Maktab Rendah Sains MARA (MRSM). The goal is to demonstrate the distributive justice of MRSM leaders. Distributive justice increases commitment, which comes from a fair environment. It is expected to improve overall organizational performance, potentially resulting in increased efficiency, enhanced productivity, and improved outcomes. The research also investigates how transformational leadership affects the connection between distributive justice and commitment. Transformational leadership may amplify the positive effects of justice.

The theoretical contributions of this research will extend an MRSM "Gateway to Holistic Education 2021-2025" (Majlis Amanah Rakyat MARA, 2021a) framework leadership studies and identify effective transformational leadership that develops the perception of justice and commitment; the research aims to help MRSM tailor its leadership development programs, thus enhancing overall effectiveness (Johari et al., 2023). The findings will inform targeted policies and programs to promote fairness and commitment within MRSM. These include transparent decision-making processes, equitable reward systems, and practices for inclusive leadership. These initiatives aim to reduce the negative consequences of ineffective leadership, improve morale, and reduce turnover, creating a stable, productive, and positive educational environment.

This research predicts that MRSM leaders can recognize the significance of distributive justice and affective commitment. If the organization maintains a high affective commitment due to perceived justice, it will improve MRSM's performance. By considering transformational leadership as a mediating variable, the research contributes to understanding the effect of distributive justice on affective commitment, thus advancing and improving leadership activities. The hope is that MRSM can establish policies or programs that promote distributive justice and commitment while avoiding negative consequences, thereby optimizing organizational leadership practices.

Theoretical Framework

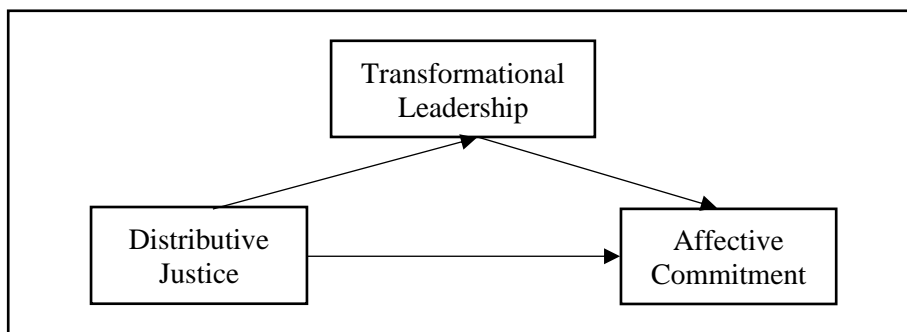


Figure 1. Research Framework

This study examines the leadership styles employed within MRSM, specifically focusing on how leaders perceive themselves in transformational leadership. Furthermore, the study explores the relationship between transformational leadership and affective commitment. The research will also investigate the role of transformational leadership as a mediating variable influencing the effect of distributive justice on affective commitment and determining the organizational effects that should be necessary in planning leadership appointments to optimize

leader effectiveness and commitment outcomes.

Research Hypotheses

- H1: Distributive justice has a positive effect on transformational leadership and affective commitment
- H2: Transformational leadership mediates between distributive justice and affective commitment.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employed a quantitative approach to investigate the relationship between distributive justice, transformational leadership, and affective commitment among MRSM leaders. The respondents' responses were collected through an online questionnaire to facilitate easy access and encourage participation across the 57 MRSM. The population comprised leaders at various levels, including principals, vice principals, and heads of departments.

Using a formula, $s = \frac{X^2NP(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + X^2P(1-P)}$ where s = Required sample, X^2 = The table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841), N = The population size, P = The population proportion (0.5), d = The degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.05), the sample size was determined to be 210 participants, ensuring the sample was enough for meaningful generalization. Job titles depicting leadership positions and roles by using stratified random sampling. The stratified random sampling method ensured that the diverse subgroups within the 210 sample.

The questionnaire included demographics, distributive justice, transformational leadership, and affective commitment sections. The items measuring distributive justice were adapted from Colquitt (2001) with permission, while transformational leadership is licensed to use the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Avolio, 1999). from Mind Garden, Inc. Dr. Natalie Allen adapted and granted the revised TCM Employee Commitment Survey (Mayer, 2024). Pearson correlation analysis was applied to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between the variables. Cronbach's alpha assesses internal consistency, with values above 0.70 considered reliable (Adeniran, 2019). This comprehensive approach ensured that the data collected were valid and reliable, clearly reflecting the MRSM leadership demographic in Malaysia.

Data Collection

The survey was administered to leaders from the 57 MRSM and distributed online via Google Forms with permission from the Director of the Secondary Education Division. The survey link was distributed through email, and the data collection period was extended from July 29, 2024, to August 12, 2024. After the deadline, the form was closed to prevent further responses. This approach provided an efficient and cost-effective means of gathering data from the target population.

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1. Distribution of Sample by Selected Demographic Variables Reflects MRSM Leaders

	Gender		Job Title			Administration Experience (Years)		
	Male	Female	Principal	Vice Principal	Head of Department	<= 10	11- 20	21+
N	126	84	26	78	106	134	74	2
%	60.0%	40.0%	12.4%	37.1%	50.5%	63.8%	35.2%	1.0%

The sample's demographic characteristics are based on gender, job title, and administrative experience. The sample consisted of 210 respondents, of which 126 (60.0%) were male and 84 (40.0%) were female. Regarding job titles, 26 respondents (12.4%) were principals, 78 (37.1%) were vice principals, and 106 (50.5%) were heads of departments, illustrating a balanced representation across different leadership positions.

Regarding administrative experience, the majority of the respondents, 134 (63.8%), reported having ten years or less experience. A further 74 respondents (35.2%) indicated having between 11 and 20 years of experience, while only two (1.0%) reported having more than 21 years of administrative experience. These demographics provide a comprehensive overview of the diversity in gender, job roles, and administrative tenure within the sample, offering a robust foundation for subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Analysis of Variance in MRSM Leaders Job Title

Dependent Variables	I	J	MD (I-J)	Sig.
Affective Commitment	Principal	Head of Department	0.434	0.005
Affective Commitment	Vice Principal	Head of Department	0.280	0.009

Note: MD; mean difference, $p < 0.05$

A One-Way ANOVA analysis in Table 2 examines differences in levels of leadership roles toward affective commitment for principals, vice principals, and heads of departments. The mean difference in affective commitment between principals and heads of departments was 0.434, with a statistically significant result ($p = 0.005$). Similarly, the mean difference between vice principals and heads of departments was 0.280, which was statistically significant ($p = 0.009$).

These results indicate that principals and vice principals exhibit significantly higher levels of affective commitment than heads of departments, suggesting that this leadership is associated with emotional engagement and organization.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis by Selected Variables

	Distributive Justice	Transformational Leadership	Affective Commitment
Distributive Justice	1	.596**	.246**
Transformational Leadership		1	.308**
Affective Commitment			1

This study conducted a Pearson correlation analysis of distributive justice, transformational leadership, and affective commitment. The results in Table 3. distributive justice and transformational leadership ($r = 0.596$, $p < 0.01$), distributive justice and affective commitment ($r = 0.308$, $p < 0.01$), and transformational leadership and affective commitment ($r = 0.308$, $p < 0.001$) were significantly positively correlated. The correlation provides the conditions for subsequent mediation effect testing.

Mediation Analysis

Table 4. Regression Analysis between Distributive Justice, Transformational Leadership Styles and Affective Commitment for Model 1 and Model. 2

Model		β	SE	t	Sig.	R	R ²	F	Sig. F
1 c	DJ	0.220	0.073	3.661	0.000	0.246 ^a	0.061	13.406	0.000
2 c'	DJ*TL	0.018	0.100	0.180	0.857	.318 ^b	0.101	4.641	0.011

Note: DJ (Distributive Justice); TL (Transformational Leadership)

a. Dependent Variable: Affective Commitment

b. Predictors: (Constant), Distributive Justice and Transformational Leadership

The regression analysis revealed that distributive justice significantly predicts affective commitment with an (R^2) value of 0.061, indicating that 6.1% of the variance in affective commitment contributes to distributive justice, while the remaining 93.9% contribution is by other unexplored variables. The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 13.406$, $p < 0.05$), confirming that distributive justice validly predicts affective commitment.

Model 1 (Path c): As presented in Table 4, the unstandardized regression coefficient (β) for distributive justice in predicting affective commitment was ($\beta = 0.220$), with a t-value of 3.661 and ($p = 0.000$). This finding indicates that for each one-unit increase in distributive justice, affective commitment increases by 0.220 units, satisfying the first condition for mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

The multiple regression analysis of distributive justice and transformational leadership styles on affective commitment indicates the (R^2) value was 0.101, indicating that these two variables explain 10.1% of the variance in affective commitment, leaving 89.9% of the variance attributable to other unexamined factors. The regression model was significant ($F = 4.641$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that the combination of distributive justice and transformational leadership styles effectively predicts affective commitment.

Model 2 (Path (c')): As detailed in Table 4, the unstandardized regression coefficient (β) for distributive justice and transformational leadership styles was ($\beta = 0.018$), with a t-value of 0.180 and ($p > 0.05$). This model indicates that the effect of distributive justice on affective commitment is not statistically significant. Therefore, an increase of one unit in organizational justice leads to a predicted decrease of 0.018 units in affective commitment. The non-significant result for (c') implies that the effect of distributive justice on affective commitment is fully mediated by transformational leadership styles, fulfilling mediation criteria (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

These findings suggest that distributive justice positive effect on affective commitment operates entirely through transformational leadership. They emphasize the necessity of fostering transformational leadership styles among MRSMS leaders to enhance affective commitment and underscore the transformational pathway as a critical mechanism in leadership development programs.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated the relationship between distributive justice and affective commitment among MRSM leaders, focusing on transformational leadership's mediating effect. Transformational leadership styles were prominently adopted by MRSM leaders at various hierarchical levels, indicating that the organization's leaders frequently employ these styles to foster commitment and motivate followers effectively (Sariono et al., 2024).

This transformational leadership style directly affects the level of affective commitment, which refers to an organizational member's emotional attachment (Allen & Meyer, 1990) (Meyer & Allen, 2004) and identification with their organization (Borde et al., 2024). Leaders who effectively represent transformational leaders can significantly enhance followers' high commitment by aligning organizational goals with personal values, fostering loyalty and long-term dedication (Sariono et al., 2024).

MRSM's Leadership Development Program emphasizes adopting practical and innovative leadership approaches, specifically transformational leadership, as one of its strategic objectives (Buang, 2024). The program instills leadership values and concepts among newly recruited MRSM leaders (Majlis Amanah Rakyat, 2021a; 2021b).

This strategic focus on transformational leadership is instrumental in developing leaders who are committed at an emotional level, thus enhancing affective commitment within the organization (Purwanto et al., 2020a; 2020b). When leaders perceive their role as aligned with organizational values and experience opportunities for growth, they are likely to develop a stronger sense of belonging and commitment, contributing positively to the organizational culture (Ly, 2024).

Affective commitment is influenced by the distributive justice and supportive environment fostered by transformational leaders. Transformational leaders prioritize the long-term needs of their groups, often placing the collective interests above personal, short-term gains (Omar et al., 2021). By creating a vision that inspires and motivates, these leaders instill a sense of purpose and belonging, central to enhancing affective commitment. This aligns a view that leaders act as role models, encouraging followers to identify with organizational values and goals (Avolio et al., 1994 & Bakker et al., 2023).

Moreover, when transformational leaders ensure fair and transparent processes within MRSM, leaders are more likely to feel respected and valued, reinforcing their emotional attachment to the organization. This perception of fairness, coupled with the vision and motivation of transformational leaders, creates a work environment that promotes a high level of affective commitment (Omar et al., 2021). The data from this study confirmed that MRSM leaders who perceived higher levels of distributive justice and transformational leadership also reported a stronger sense of affective commitment, indicating the interconnected nature of these factors.

CONCLUSIONS

This study underlines the importance of transformational leadership and distributive justice in cultivating affective commitment. In educational sector settings like MRSM, affective commitment is crucial for organizational effectiveness and stability. Leaders who experience a strong emotional attachment to their institution are more likely to stay committed and strive toward achieving strategic objectives (Shafiee et al., 2021). By embedding transformational leadership practices into MRSM's culture, leaders align with the organization's mission and develop a deep emotional bond with their work, increasing productivity and performance (Welch, 2024).

Developing social connections, an important aspect of transformational leadership further reinforces affective commitment (Kilag et al., 2024). Transformational leaders who foster solid relationships and open communication channels among followers contribute significantly to creating a cohesive and motivated work environment (Shatila et al., 2024). This supportive network promotes trust and collaboration, increasing emotional attachment and commitment (Omar et al., 2021).

Additionally, providing autonomy and empowering leaders within MRSM strengthens affective commitment (Shafiee et al., 2021). Transformational leaders who offer autonomy enable followers to align their values with organizational practices (Burhan & Khan, 2024). The data demonstrates that this alignment enhances affective commitment by ensuring leaders feel ownership and pride in their work (Kilag et al., 2024). Empowering leaders to make meaningful decisions and engage in organizational practices increases their motivation, performance, and emotional investment in the institution (Burhan & Khan, 2024).

The findings support that transformational leadership significantly influences the relationship between distributive justice and affective commitment among MRSM leaders (Shafiee et al., 2021). Transformational leadership creates an emotionally supportive environment that promotes fair practices and distributive justice, further strengthening affective commitment (Singh et al., 2024). The alignment between organizational objectives, fair leadership practices, and transformational approaches fosters a cohesive and motivated leadership culture, essential for sustaining high levels of commitment and achieving (Budiarti et al., 2022) MRSM's strategic goals (Majlis Amanah Rakyat MARA, 2021a; 2021b).

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