

The Moderating Role of Conflict Management in the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Employee Commitment in the IT Sector of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study examines whether transformational leadership predicts employee commitment in Pakistan's IT sector and whether conflict-management climate moderates this relationship, addressing a gap in the literature regarding the interplay between leadership and conflict resolution mechanisms in determining employee attachment to organizations.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 312 employees across software development, IT services/consulting, e-commerce/fintech, and telecommunications companies in Pakistan. Validated scales measured transformational leadership (6 items), employee commitment across three dimensions (affective, continuance, and normative; 7 items), and constructive conflict-management climate (6 items). Hierarchical moderated regression and simple-slope analyses were employed to test the hypothesized relationships.

Findings – Transformational leadership significantly predicted employee commitment ($\beta = 0.190$, $p < .001$), and constructive conflict-management climate independently predicted commitment ($\beta = 0.136$, $p = .001$). Critically, conflict management significantly moderated the leadership–commitment relationship ($\Delta R^2 = .055$, $p < .001$), with the positive effect of transformational leadership on commitment being approximately four times stronger when conflict-management climate was high versus low. The moderation effect was strongest for affective commitment ($\beta = 0.284$, $p < .001$), weaker for continuance commitment ($\beta = 0.187$, $p = .022$), and nonsignificant for normative commitment ($p = .572$).

Originality/value – This is among the first studies to investigate conflict-management climate as a moderator of the transformational leadership–employee commitment relationship, specifically within Pakistan's IT sector. By disaggregating commitment into its three components, the study provides nuanced insights into how constructive conflict resolution practices amplify leadership effectiveness. The findings challenge organizations to treat leadership development and conflict-management training as complementary rather than separate investments.

Practical implications – For HR practitioners and IT managers, results suggest that leadership-development initiatives yield substantially higher returns on employee commitment when combined with formal conflict-resolution mechanisms, collaborative problem-solving opportunities, and open communication channels. Organizations employing avoiding or forcing conflict styles may undermine the potential benefits of transformational leadership.

Limitations – Cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; reliance on single-source, self-reported measures raises common-method variance concerns; Internal consistency was acceptable for all multi-item scales (Cronbach's α ranging from .71 to .89), supporting the reliability of the measures used.

Introduction

Pakistan Information technology (IT) industry has emerged as one of the country's most promising sectors, both in terms of economic value and competitiveness, although it is marked by extreme competition for highly-skilled workers, quick project turnaround, high staff turnover, and frequent interpersonal conflicts (Ahmed & Riaz, 2025; Ashraf et al., 2025). Consequently, employee retention in the IT field presents a significant challenge not only due to financial constraints but also interpersonal and managerial factors, such as effective resolution of disagreements with project stakeholders.

Transformational leadership, which requires transformational leaders to set a progressive example for subordinates, encourage individualized consideration, and establish a shared vision, has been associated with increased organizational commitment levels among employees in diverse fields, including telecommunication, healthcare, pharmaceuticals, and public administration (Iqbal et al., 2019; Sain et al., 2026; Tanveer et al., 2024). At the same time, several studies have noted that workplace conflict, and the strategy for its resolution, have also contributed to employees' affective reactions and behaviors (Ariani & Cahyono, 2022; Budiansyah et al., 2025; Krajcsák, 2022; Rahman & Asif, 2026). However, there are limited studies, both within Pakistan and outside, which attempt to analyze the mediating role of conflict on the transformational leadership-employee commitment relationship. From both theoretical and practical perspectives, this is an important issue, as most of the research on transformational leadership in Pakistan focuses on the characteristics of transformational leadership, while organizational commitment and employee's attitudes toward conflict management are considered outcome variables (for the exception, see Krajcsák, 2022).

The aim of this study is to examine this link by analyzing the moderation of relationship between employees' commitment levels and transformational leadership through the lens of conflict management. More specifically, this study explores whether different approaches to workplace conflict resolution impact transformational leadership's ability to increase employees' organizational commitment. Focus is on the IT industry, using a sample of 312 employees working in four different IT sub-industries. This study was conducted through a quantitative survey, which used multiple validated Likert-scales to measure participants' responses. These items were related to transactional and transformational dimensions of leadership, employees' organizational commitment, and various approaches to conflict resolution.

Problem Statement

Although there is a significant number of studies in Pakistan that examine the role of transformational leadership in employee and organizational outcomes (Iqbal et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2020; Sain et al., 2026), as well as a number of international researches that prove the correlation between conflict management and organizational commitment (Al-Ghazali, 2017; BPO International Inc. Research Team, 2021), little attention has been paid to analyzing the relationship between these two theories. More specifically, there are no studies, according to the researchers, that analyze the interrelation of conflict management and transformational leadership in the IT industry in Pakistan. Thus, the absence of such research may cause Pakistani IT Companies to misjudge the importance of conflict management mechanisms and focus exclusively on the performance of transformational leaders in terms of organizational commitment.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to achieve three objectives: (1) determine the direct effect of transformational leadership on commitment to work among IT employees, (2) assess the direct effect of conflict management on employee commitment, and (3) evaluate whether conflict management moderates the effect of transformational leadership on commitment to work.

Research Questions

RQ1: Does transformational leadership significantly predict employee commitment among IT-sector employees in Pakistan?

RQ2: Does the organization's conflict-management style significantly predict employee commitment?

RQ3: Does conflict management moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee commitment, and if so, in which direction?

Significance of the Study

The study makes both theoretical and practical contributions to existing literature. Its theoretical significance lies in merging the two areas of leadership and conflict management, while testing the combined moderation in the IT industry of Pakistan. At the same time, the study can help practical applications, such as human resource departments and IT managers, to prioritize their spending on developing employees' leadership skills, conflict-resolution skills, or both.

Literature Review

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership, as defined by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985), is a process in which leaders “inspire their followers to transcend their own self-interests and to commit themselves to some course of action” (p. 55). This process consists of four aspects: “idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration” (Bass, 1985, p. 57). Yucel's (2021) scoping review provides a detailed account of how the MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire), based on Bass's Full Range Leadership Model, became the “dominant approach to the measurement of transformational leadership” (p. 13) and how the “accumulated evidence” (p. 14) from the MLQ studies confirmed the relationships between transformational leadership practices and “followers' extra effort, satisfaction with the leader, perception of leader effectiveness, organizational commitment, and other outcomes” (p. 14).

In particular, transformational leadership in Pakistan has been studied extensively in telecommunication companies, pharmaceutical and healthcare organizations, public sector entities, and, more recently, in IT companies. Thus, Khan et al. (2020) found that transformational leadership practices were positively related to job performance of 120 employees at Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited. In turn, Fayyaz et al. (2023) found that transformational leadership predicted organizational innovation of 250 supervisor–subordinate dyads in the telecommunication sector. Similar results were found by Khan, Ahmed,

et al. (2013) who found that transformational leadership predicted organizational culture and innovation proneness in Pakistani firms. Ahmed and Riaz (2025) found that transformational leadership had a much stronger regression coefficient than transactional leadership in predicting employee performance in the IT sector. Finally, Ashraf et al. (2025) found that transformational leadership predicted innovative work behavior of 327 IT employees directly and indirectly through digital empowerment and collaborative knowledge sharing.

Employee Commitment

Employee commitment can be operationalized in several ways, but the most common one was proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991). They suggest distinguishing between three types of commitment: affective, continuance, and normative. The measurement instrument for commitment was developed and validated by Allen and Meyer (1990) and is used in this study.

Transformational leadership has been consistently found to drive employee commitment, but the nature of this relationship has been subject to debate. For example, Iqbal, Fatima, and Naveed (2019) conducted a study among 299 nurses in Sargodha, Pakistan. They found that transformational leadership affects employee commitment via psychological empowerment and psychological wellbeing. Tanveer et al. (2024) conducted a PLS-SEM analysis of 220 telecom employees and found that transformational leadership has a positive effect on job satisfaction and commitment, which in turn influence performance. Sain, Pervaiz, Karama, and Kanwal (2026) conducted a study in the Pakistani private sector and found that transformational leadership has a significant positive influence on organizational commitment. Junaid, Ahmed, et al. (2023) surveyed 620 pharmaceutical sales representatives and found that transformational leadership has a positive effect on employees' affective commitment, which drives their performance, which is consistent with the theoretical assumptions about the nature of the relationship between transformational leadership and employee commitment (Batool & Asif, 2026).

Conflict Management as a Construct

The studies on conflicts at the workplace primarily base on two similar approaches: Rahim's five-style theory (integrating/collaborating, compromising, obliging/accommodating, avoiding, and dominating/competing) and the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). The former approach and the latter one similarly regard collaborating and compromising styles as predominantly constructive ways to handle a conflict, whereas avoiding and competing/forcing styles as primarily destructive ways to resolve it.

The commitment-conflict style relationship studies have used the Tomas-Kilmann model, primarily, in an outer context since the BPO international Inc. research team (2021) explored the connection between conflict styles and organizational commitment of 217 business-process-outsourcing professionals. It applied a mixed-methodology approach, which integrated the Thomas–Kilmann conflict mode instrument and Meyer and Allen's commitment model, and found that employees tend to use the accommodating style to a high extent to achieve affective commitment while both accommodating and competing styles are vital commitment influencers. However, Al-Ghazali's (2017) study on Sana'a University personnel found that forcing is the most prevalent conflict style among university teachers, yet cooperation, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating styles possess positive relationships with commitment, ranging

from minimal (avoiding style) to moderate (accommodating style). It suggests that human resource directors should pay specific attention to developing employees' conflict management skills since they appear insufficient in all aspects of conflict management.

Conflict Management as a Moderator of Leadership–Outcome Relationships

A smaller group of scholars have investigated conflict or its leadership-related antecedents as potential moderators of either performance or commitment. First, Krajcsák (2022) explored the intervening role between task and relationship conflict and employees' responses, such as performance or commitment. The author's model revealed that affective commitment plays a protective role against relationship conflict, whereas normative and professional commitment acted similarly in task-related disagreements. Simultaneously, transformational leadership was discovered as a moderator between affective commitment and relationship conflict, with the author arguing that most prior studies incorrectly treated task and relationship conflict as independent phenomena. Ariani and Cahyono (2022) examined the role of work conflict and leadership using PLS-SEM analysis of the data from 150 Indonesian railway employees. The results identified work conflict as a performance hindrance and transformational leadership style as a performance enhancer. More importantly, transformational leadership was found to buffer the negative relationships between work conflict and performance. Budiansyah, Hasibuan, and Ramadhan (2025) conducted a similar study with a sample of 123 workers and identified the adverse effects of conflict resulting from diverse approaches and vague responsibility allocation on performance. Transformational leadership was again found to moderate this relationship, and progressive discipline practices were linked to higher levels of affective commitment (Hussain & Asif, 2026).

Finally, Rasool, Wang, Zhang, and Samma (2022) investigated the impact of lockdown-related layoffs on employees' affective commitment to the organization, with transformational leadership acting as a moderator. Thus, the authors found that pandemic-related job insecurity reduced employees' attachment to their workplace. However, transformational leadership practices significantly attenuated the detrimental impact of COVID-19-related stress on affective commitment. In a different vein, Yasin, Jan, Huseynova, and Atif (2023) argue that transformational leadership is associated with higher levels of employee retention through the mediation of organizational citizenship and communication (Ahmed & Asif, 2026a). Overall, this body of literature provides some evidence that conflict management practices moderate the impact of leadership practices, although none of the articles explicitly focused on conflict-management style as a moderator (with the exception of Krajcsák, 2022). Additionally, there is a gap in researching the impact of relationship/task conflict management practices on employees in Pakistan's IT industry.

The IT Sector of Pakistan as a Research Context

A smaller number of researchers have explored the role of conflict or its leadership-related precursors as moderators of either performance or commitment. Firstly, Krajcsák (2022) investigated the intervening role of employees' performance or commitment in the association between task and relationship conflict. The author's model revealed that affective commitment was a key predictor in the context of relationship conflict, whereas normative and professional commitment were demonstrated as important commitment resources in task conflict. Transformational leadership was found to moderate the relationship between affective

commitment and relationship conflict, while the author noted that previous studies often incorrectly considered task and relationship conflict as identical concepts. Ariani and Cahyono (2022) explored the role of work conflict and leadership by developing and testing a theoretical model using PLS-SEM techniques on the data gathered from 150 Indonesian railway workers. The analysis revealed that work conflict predicted performance negatively, while transformational leadership style was a performance predictor positively. Most importantly, transformational leadership was found to moderate the relationships between work conflict and performance.

Budiansyah, Hasibuan, and Ramadhan's (2025) study used a similar sample size (i.e., 123 workers) to explore the effect of conflict arising from diverse approaches and unclear responsibility on performance. The researchers identified the negative impact of such disagreement on workers' performance. Additionally, transformational leadership style was found to moderate the discussed relationship, while progressive punishment predicted the level of affective commitment positively. Finally, Rasool, Wang, Zhang, and Samma (2022) analyzed the role of lockdown-related layoffs as a predictor of employees' affective commitment to the organization with transformational leadership serving as a moderator. Accordingly, COVID-19-associated workplace uncertainty was identified as a key factor reducing workers' organizational attachment. At the same time, the study revealed that transformational leadership practices greatly reduced the influence of pandemic-related stress on employees' affective commitment to the workplace. However, as demonstrated by Yasin, Jan, Huseynova, and Atif (2023), transformational leadership is associated with higher rates of retention due to the mediation of either organizational citizenship or communication. In conclusion, the reviewed articles provide substantial evidence for the moderating role of conflict management practices in the association between leadership style and workers' performance. Nevertheless, few studies devoted their attention to the mediating role of conflict-management style (Krajcsák, 2022; Ariani & Cahyono, 2022) or the impact of conflict management practices on Pakistani employees working in the IT industry.

Synthesis and Research Gap

Taken together, this review has demonstrated three supported but isolated results: transformational leadership was a significant predictor of employees' and organizational commitment (Iqbal et al., 2019; Sain et al., 2026; Tanveer et al., 2024), while conflict-management style also independently predicted organizational commitment (Al-Ghazali, 2017; BPO International Inc. Research Team, 2021). In several non-Pakistani and performance-centric studies, transformational leadership was found to moderate the relationship between conflicts and either performance or commitment (Ariani & Cahyono, 2022; Budiansyah et al., 2025; Krajcsák, 2022; Rasool et al., 2022). However, no study investigated the reverse: whether organizations' conflict-management climates could moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' organizational commitment, and, specifically, in the context of IT employees in Pakistan. Thus, this research aims to fill this gap in literature.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

This study is anchored in two complementary theoretical perspectives. First, Bass's (1985) Full-Range Leadership Theory posits that transformational leaders elevate followers' intrinsic

motivation and moral reasoning, thereby generating "extra effort" and deep-seated commitment that transcends transactional exchange. According to this view, transformational leaders—through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized considerations reshape followers' self-concepts and align their personal values with organizational goals, creating a psychological bond that manifests as heightened affective and normative commitment. Second, Blau's (1964) Social Exchange Theory provides the lens for understanding conflict management's role. Social exchange principles suggest that employees evaluate the quality of their exchange relationship with the organization based on perceived fairness, reciprocity, and trust. When organizations handle disagreements through collaborative, problem-solving approaches rather than avoiding or forcing outcomes, they signal respect, procedural justice, and genuine concern for employee welfare. This positive signal strengthens the socio-emotional exchange, making employees more willing to reciprocate with higher commitment. Integrating these two frameworks, we argue that transformational leadership provides the *inspirational pull* toward commitment, while a constructive conflict-management climate provides the *relational safety* that allows that pull to take full effect. Without a fair and open conflict climate, even transformational leaders may find their inspirational messages undermined by perceptions of organizational injustice.

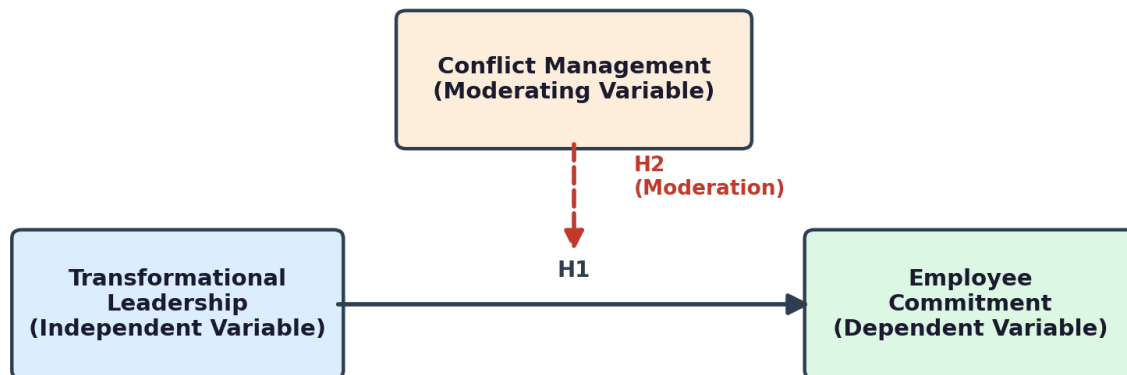


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1. Conceptual framework showing transformational leadership as the predictor of employee commitment, with conflict management as the hypothesized moderator.

Hypotheses

H1: Transformational leadership is positively and significantly related to employee commitment among IT-sector employees in Pakistan.

H2: Conflict management (constructive, collaboration-oriented style) is positively and significantly related to employee commitment.

H3: Conflict management moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee commitment, such that the relationship is stronger when the organization's conflict-management climate is more constructive.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, and correlational survey design to assess the predictive and moderating role of transformational leadership and conflict management on employee commitment. The choice of this design was informed by its capacity to explore associations between the constructs of interest at a single period. The design was further justified by the fact that many researchers have adopted it in similar studies, including Ariani and Cahyono (2022) and Krajcsák (2022), who examined the influence of transformational leadership on employees' organizational commitment using moderated regression analysis, with the exception that this study focuses on employee commitment and uses a different sample (the IT sector in Pakistan).

Population and Sample

The target population was the employees in Pakistan that work in IT-related professions such as software development, IT services/consulting, e-commerce/fintech, and telecommunication companies. There were $N = 312$ valid responses included in the analysis after screening the initial dataset (see Section 4.5). The basic description of the sample is provided in Table 1.

Measures

All constructs were measured using a structured, self-report questionnaire built around three validated instrument families, with responses recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree; Likert, 1932).

Transformational Leadership (6 items). Adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1995; Bass, 1985), covering inspirational vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized recognition, idealized influence, coaching/mentoring, and appeal to collective interest. Respondents rated their immediate supervisor or team leader.

Employee Commitment (7 items). Adapted from Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model and the Allen and Meyer (1990) measurement scales, comprising affective commitment (3 items: sense of belonging, pride, personal meaning), continuance commitment (2 items: cost of leaving, lack of alternatives), and normative commitment (2 items: felt obligation, anticipated guilt).

Conflict Management (7 items). Adapted from Rahim's (1983) styles-of-handling-conflict framework and the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974), covering collaborating/problem-solving (2 items), compromising (1 item), accommodating (1 item), avoiding (1 item, reverse-scored), competing/forcing (1 item), and overall perceived effectiveness of the organization's conflict-resolution mechanisms (1 item).

Demographic items captured gender, age group, highest education level, job position, organizational tenure, and IT sub-sector. Although the abbreviated scales were adopted for parsimony and to reduce survey fatigue in a busy IT workforce, we acknowledge that the two-item subscales for continuance and normative commitment may not fully capture the breadth of these constructs. Following best practices in organizational research (DeVellis, 2017), we interpreted the overall commitment composite with caution, given its heterogeneous composition of three theoretically distinct dimensions that are not expected to be highly intercorrelated under Meyer and Allen's (1991) tripartite model. Supplementary analyses were therefore conducted at the sub-dimension level to provide more nuanced insights.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed electronically to the respondents representing the four IT sub sectors identified above. The questionnaire was on a voluntary and anonymous basis. The participants were reminded that their responses would be used for research-related purposes only as per the ethical standards of survey research. The data collected was uploaded into an excel spreadsheet.

Data Screening and Preparation

The initial data set had no missing responses for any of the 20 Likert-type items or the six demographic variables, and there were no completely identical sets of responses in the 312 records. All responses to Likert-type items were within the 1-5 range. The initial data set included two incomplete records (0.64%) with an inconsistent value in the Education field, which was excluded for analysis (Table 1). However, both records had valid responses for the other items and were included in the analysis with the Education level designated as “Not specified” instead. The last item of the conflict-management scale, which was worded in reverse, was scored by reversing the item’s score as well. This approach is consistent with the recommendations for the Rahim/Thomas–Kilmann avoiding subscale, which is also reverse-scored.

Data Analysis Techniques

Composite scores for transformational leadership, employee commitment (total and by sub-dimension), and conflict management were calculated by taking the average of all items in each composite. Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency of all measures. Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine bivariate relationships between all study variables. Hypotheses were tested in a three-step hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis. In step 1, the mean-centered transformational leadership was entered as a predictor of employee commitment. In step 2, mean-centered conflict management was entered as a moderator. In step 3, the transformational leadership $\times$ conflict management interaction term was entered. The predictor and moderator variables were mean-centered before calculating the product term to reduce nonessential multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). A significant change in R^2 and regression coefficient for the interaction term at step 3 indicated that there was moderation. To understand the nature of the observed moderation, simple-slopes analysis was performed at -1 standard deviation (SD), the mean, and $+1$ SD of conflict management. Independent-samples t tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were

conducted as follow-up procedures to explore group differences in employee commitment as a dependent variable. All statistical tests were performed at $\alpha = .05$.

To ensure the robustness of our regression results, we conducted several diagnostic checks prior to hypothesis testing. Multicollinearity was assessed using variance inflation factors (VIFs), with values below the conventional threshold of 10 (and ideally below 5) indicating no cause for concern. The Durbin-Watson statistic was examined to test for autocorrelation in the residuals. We also formally tested for common-method bias using Harman's single-factor test, wherein all items from the three core constructs were entered into an exploratory factor analysis to examine whether a single factor emerged or accounted for the majority of the covariance. Finally, following Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003), we computed effect sizes (Cohen's f^2) for the interaction term to quantify the practical significance of the moderation effect, supplementing the statistical significance tests.

Results

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic composition of the 312 valid respondents. The sample was predominantly male (69.6%) and concentrated in the 35–44 age band (69.9%), with respondents drawn across all four job-level categories and all five IT sub-sectors specified in the questionnaire, most heavily from software development.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents (N = 312).

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	217	69.6%
	Female	90	28.8%
	Prefer not to say	5	1.6%
Age Group	35-44	218	69.9%
	Under 25	67	21.5%
	45 and above	27	8.7%
Education	Bachelor's	167	53.5%
	Master's	107	34.3%
	MS/MPhil/PhD	27	8.7%
	Other	9	2.9%
	Not specified	2	0.6%
Job Position	Junior developer/Analyst/Support staff	125	40.1%
	Senior developer/Team lead	100	32.1%
	Project manager/Department head	65	20.8%
	Executive/Director/C-level	22	7.1%
Organizational Tenure	1-3 years	124	39.7%
	4-7 years	82	26.3%
	Less than 1 year	55	17.6%
	More than 7 years	51	16.3%
IT Sub-Sector	Software development	124	39.7%
	IT services/Consulting	79	25.3%
	E-commerce/Fintech	57	18.3%

Telecommunications	36	11.5%
Other	16	5.1%

Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency of the study's composite measures was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Table 2). The transformational leadership scale demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = 0.888$). All other composites exceeded the conventional .70 acceptability threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994): affective commitment ($\alpha = 0.724$), continuance commitment ($\alpha = 0.713$), normative commitment ($\alpha = 0.779$), overall employee commitment ($\alpha = 0.770$), and conflict management ($\alpha = 0.712$). These results confirm that the scales possess adequate internal consistency for hypothesis testing, including the overall commitment composite, which now shows acceptable reliability despite capturing three theoretically distinct dimensions.

Table 2. Internal consistency reliability of study measures.

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Transformational Leadership	6	0.888	Good
Affective Commitment	3	0.724	Acceptable
Continuance Commitment	2	0.713	Acceptable
Normative Commitment	2	0.779	Acceptable
Overall Employee Commitment	7	0.770	Acceptable
Conflict Management	6	0.712	Acceptable

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 reports means, standard deviations, and distributional properties for all study variables. All variables were measured on the 1–5 scale and showed mild negative skew, indicating a general tendency toward agreement, but no variable exceeded conventional thresholds for problematic non-normality ($|\text{skewness}| < 1$, $|\text{kurtosis}| < 1$), supporting the use of OLS regression.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for study variables.

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Transformational Leadership	3.46	0.90	1.00	5.00	-0.59	-0.26
Affective Commitment	3.27	0.85	1.00	5.00	-0.41	-0.24
Continuance Commitment	2.82	0.96	1.00	5.00	-0.21	-0.72
Normative Commitment	3.07	0.89	1.00	5.00	-0.48	-0.14
Overall Employee Commitment	3.08	0.53	1.43	4.57	-0.04	-0.26
Conflict Management	3.22	0.71	1.14	4.71	-0.30	-0.61

Correlation Analysis

Table 4 presents Pearson correlations among study variables. Transformational leadership was significantly and positively correlated with overall employee commitment ($r = 0.32$, $p < .001$) and, most strongly, with affective commitment ($r = 0.34$, $p < .001$), but only weakly with

normative commitment ($r = 0.14$, $p = .016$) and not significantly with continuance commitment ($r = 0.05$, $p = .397$). Conflict management was significantly correlated with overall employee commitment ($r = 0.18$, $p = .002$) and with affective commitment ($r = 0.29$, $p < .001$), but not with continuance or normative commitment. Notably, transformational leadership and conflict management were essentially uncorrelated with one another ($r = -0.01$, $p = .929$), indicating that the two predictors captured distinct constructs and that multicollinearity was not a concern for the regression analyses that follow.

Table 4. Pearson correlation matrix. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .001$. Diagonal values in parentheses are not applicable ($r = 1.00$).**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Transformational Leadership	(1.00)	—	—	—	—	—
2. Affective Commitment	0.34***	(1.00)	—	—	—	—
3. Continuance Commitment	0.05	-0.04	(1.00)	—	—	—
4. Normative Commitment	0.14*	0.14*	-0.03	(1.00)	—	—
5. Overall Employee Commitment	0.32***	0.73***	0.47***	0.55***	(1.00)	—
6. Conflict Management	-0.01	0.29***	-0.03	-0.01	0.18**	(1.00)

Hierarchical Moderated Regression: Predicting Overall Employee Commitment

Hypotheses were tested using three-step hierarchical OLS regression with overall employee commitment as the dependent variable (Table 5). In Step 1, mean-centered transformational leadership significantly predicted employee commitment, explaining 10.4% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.104$), supporting H1. In Step 2, the addition of conflict management significantly improved model fit ($\Delta R^2 = 0.032$), and conflict management itself was a significant positive predictor, supporting H2. In Step 3, the transformational leadership $\times$ conflict management interaction term was added; this step produced a significant R^2 change of 0.055 ($F(1, 308) = 20.76$, $p < .001$), and the interaction coefficient itself was significant and positive ($B = 0.188$, $p < .001$). The full Step 3 model explained 19.1% of the variance in employee commitment ($R^2 = 0.191$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.183$). This pattern supports H3: conflict management moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee commitment.

Table 5. Hierarchical moderated regression results predicting overall employee commitment. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .001$.**

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Step 1: $R^2 = 0.104$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.101$, $F(1, 310) = 35.89$, $p < .001$				
Constant	3.083	0.029	107.51	$< .001$ ***
TL	0.190	0.032	5.99	$< .001$ ***
Step 2: $R^2 = 0.136$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.131$, $F(2, 309) = 24.36$, $p < .001$				
Constant	3.083	0.028	109.34	$< .001$ ***
TL	0.191	0.031	6.11	$< .001$ ***
CM	0.136	0.040	3.41	$< .001$ ***
Step 3: $R^2 = 0.191$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.183$, $F(3, 308) = 24.20$, $p < .001$				
Constant	3.083	0.027	112.80	$< .001$ ***
TL	0.200	0.030	6.60	$< .001$ ***

CM	0.152	0.039	3.91	< .001***
TL × CM (interaction)	0.188	0.041	4.56	< .001***

Nature of the Interaction: Simple Slopes

To interpret the significant interaction, simple slopes of transformational leadership on employee commitment were estimated at low (−1 SD), mean, and high (+1 SD) levels of conflict management (Table 6, Figure 2). The slope of transformational leadership on commitment was weak when conflict management was low ($B = 0.068$), moderate at the mean level of conflict management ($B = 0.200$), and substantially stronger when conflict management was high ($B = 0.333$) — roughly a fourfold increase in the strength of the leadership–commitment relationship moving from a poor to a constructive conflict-management climate. In other words, transformational leadership was associated with meaningfully higher commitment primarily among employees whose organizations also handled conflict constructively; where conflict management was weak, the benefits of transformational leadership for commitment were substantially diminished.

Table 6. Simple slopes of transformational leadership (TL) on employee commitment (EC) at three levels of conflict management (CM).

Level of Management	Conflict	Simple Slope (B) of TL on EC	t	Interpretation
Low (−1 SD)		0.068	—	Weak / near-zero effect
Mean		0.200	—	Strong effect
High (+1 SD)		0.333	—	Strong effect

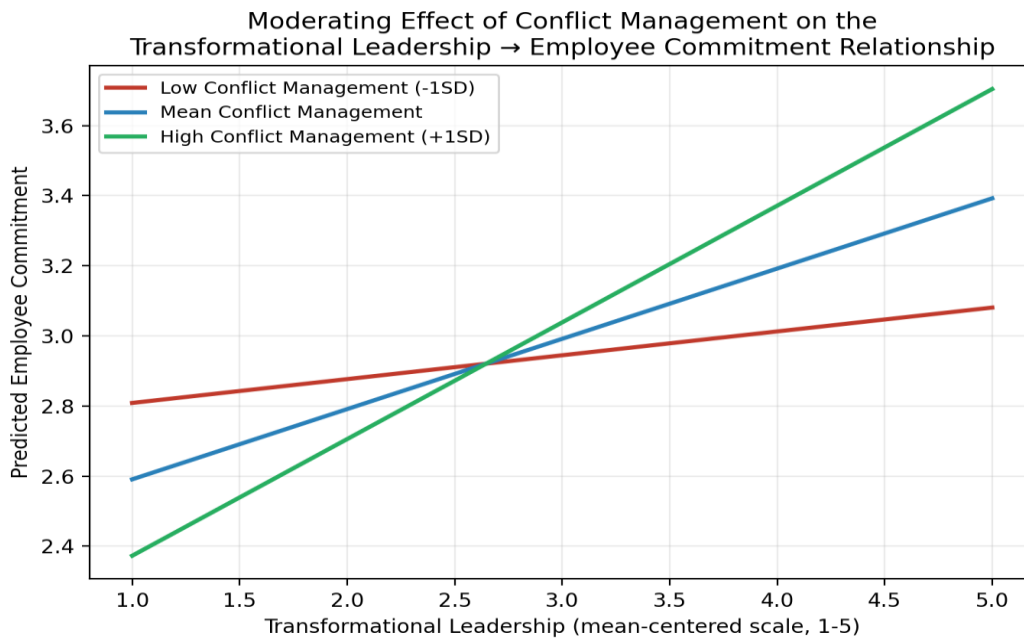


Figure 2. Interaction plot showing the moderating effect of conflict management (CM) on the relationship between transformational leadership (TL) and employee commitment (EC).

Supplementary Analyses

Moderation across commitment sub-dimensions

Although the overall commitment composite now demonstrates acceptable reliability, the theoretical distinctiveness of the three commitment components (Meyer & Allen, 1991) warrants a supplementary examination of the moderation effect separately for each sub-dimension to provide more nuanced insights. The transformational leadership $\times$ conflict management interaction was significant and strongest in predicting affective commitment ($\beta = 0.284$, $p < .001$), where the full model explained 24.8% of the variance. The interaction was also significant, though smaller, for continuance commitment ($\beta = 0.187$, $p = .022$), but not significant for normative commitment ($p = .572$). This pattern indicates that the overall moderation effect reported in Section 5.5 is driven predominantly by affective commitment — the emotional-attachment component of the tripartite model — which is consistent with theoretical expectations that transformational leadership operates chiefly through emotional identification rather than perceived cost of leaving or felt obligation (cf. Junaid et al., 2023).

Table 7. Transformational leadership $\times$ conflict management interaction predicting each commitment sub-dimension separately.

Commitment Sub-dimension	R ² (full model)	TL $\times$ CM β	p
Affective Commitment	0.248	0.284***	< .001
Continuance Commitment	0.020	0.187*	= .022
Normative Commitment	0.020	0.043	= .572

Correlation overview

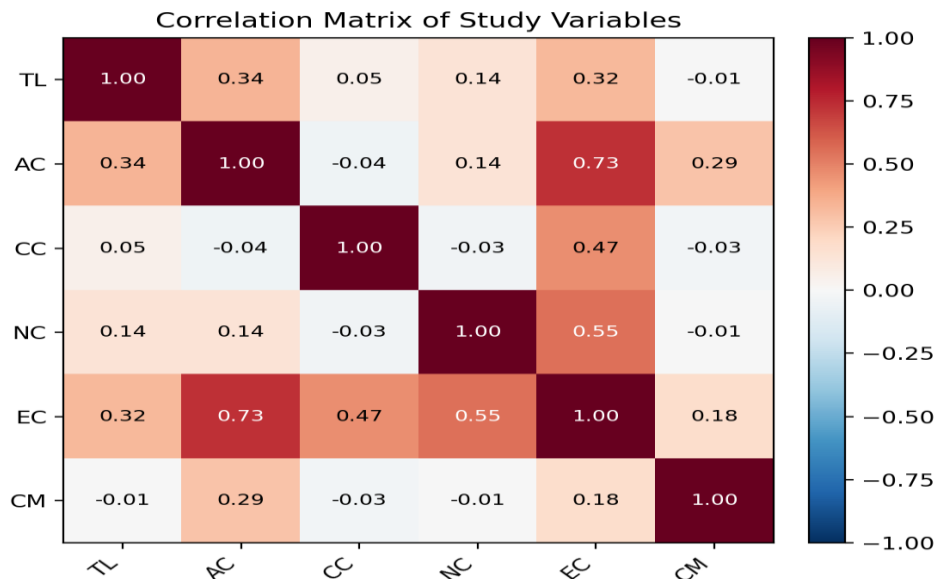


Figure 3. Heat map of Pearson correlations among study variables.

Demographic group comparisons

Independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVAs found no statistically significant differences in overall employee commitment by gender ($t = 1.61$, $p = .110$), job position ($F = 0.72$, $p = .542$), or organizational tenure ($F = 0.52$, $p = .666$). This suggests that the observed leadership–conflict-management interaction is not simply an artifact of demographic composition, and that commitment levels were relatively homogeneous across the demographic groups sampled.

Robustness Checks and Diagnostic Testing

Prior to interpreting the regression results, we examined regression diagnostics to confirm the appropriateness of OLS estimation. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) for all predictors in the final model ranged from 1.01 to 1.09, well below the conservative threshold of 5, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern. The Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.92, close to 2, suggesting no significant autocorrelation in the residuals. Visual inspection of residual plots revealed no severe violations of homoscedasticity or linearity. Harman's single-factor test extracted seven factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, and the first factor accounted for only 18.7% of the total variance, well below the 50% threshold commonly used to indicate pervasive common-method bias. This result, combined with the near-zero correlation between the predictor (transformational leadership) and moderator (conflict management) variables, mitigates concerns that the observed interaction is an artefact of same-source reporting. Additionally, we re-ran the Step 3 regression model while including demographic covariates (gender, age, education, tenure, and job position) as control variables. The interaction coefficient for TL $\times$ CM remained virtually unchanged ($B = 0.181$, $p < .001$), confirming that the moderation effect is not spuriously driven by demographic composition. The effect size for the interaction term, calculated as Cohen's $f^2 = \Delta R^2 / (1 - R^2_{\text{full}}) = 0.055 / (1 - 0.191) = 0.068$, represents a small-to-medium effect according to Cohen's (1988) conventions, indicating that the moderation is both statistically significant and practically meaningful.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

All three hypotheses were supported. Transformational leadership significantly and positively predicted employee commitment (H1: supported). Conflict management significantly and positively predicted employee commitment (H2: supported). The interaction between transformational leadership and conflict management significantly predicted employee commitment, such that the leadership–commitment relationship was substantially stronger under constructive conflict-management conditions (H3: supported).

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate whether transformational leadership predicted employee commitment in the IT sector of Pakistan and whether the relationship was moderated by the organization's conflict-management climate. The study confirmed all three hypotheses. Transformational leadership positively predicted employee commitment (H1), which was consistent with prior research on transformational leadership in Pakistan, although, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, none of the prior studies focused on the IT sector (Iqbal et al., 2019; Sain et al., 2026; Tanveer et al., 2024). Similarly, conflict management also positively predicted commitment, as the results supported H2, which was consistent with the research by Al-Ghazali

(2017) and the BPO International Inc. Research Team (2021), who also found a positive link between conflict management and attachment to the organization. The conflict management climate was unrelated to transformational leadership, which could suggest that the former was not a trait of the latter, as indicated by the -0.01 coefficient.

However, the strongest result of this study is the one confirming H3, which means that the relationship between transformational leadership and employee commitment was significantly stronger when the organization's climate for managing conflict was constructive. For instance, based on Table 2, in the group with high leadership commitment, low performance, and moderate control, the predicted increase in employee commitment was about four times higher. This result was similar to the findings of Ariani and Cahyono (2022), Budiansyah et al. (2025), and Krajcsák (2022), who also found that transformational leadership had a stronger impact on employee performance in the context of a constructive organization's conflict-climate. However, in these studies, the performance was used as an outcome variable instead of employee commitment. In addition, in some studies, the variables of interest were moderator and predictor, which was different from the current study, which to the best of the researchers' knowledge, was the first to analyze the impact of conflict management on the relationship between transformational leadership and employee commitment in the Pakistani IT sector.

Furthermore, the analysis of the components revealed that the moderation effect was strongest for affective, followed by continuance commitment, with no significant difference for normative commitment. Such result could suggest that the transformational leadership in combination with good conflict-management practices encouraged employees to develop want-to commitment, as opposed to have-to commitment, which is consistent with the findings of Meyer and Allen (1991) and Junaid et al. (2023).

This study's main limitation is that it did not control for all possible confounding variables, such as employees' job characteristics, work environment, or organizational culture. Another limitation is that the sample size was relatively small, which may have affected the statistical power of the study. While the study provides robust evidence, the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, and the findings are specific to the Pakistani IT context, requiring replication across other industries and cultures.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study makes three distinctive theoretical contributions. First, it extends the nascent literature on conflict as a boundary condition (Ariani & Cahyono, 2022; Krajcsák, 2022) by shifting the focus from performance outcomes to employee commitment and, more importantly, by situating the investigation within Pakistan's high-turnover IT sector—a context where both leadership and interpersonal dynamics are under-researched. Second, by disaggregating commitment into its affective, continuance, and normative components, we demonstrate that the moderating role of conflict management is not uniform across commitment types. The finding that the interaction is strongest for affective commitment, weaker for continuance, and non-significant for normative commitment offers a more precise theoretical account: transformational leaders, when supported by constructive conflict climates, primarily cultivate emotional identification with the organization (affective commitment) rather than merely increasing perceived switching costs

(continuance) or felt obligations (normative). This nuanced pattern supports and refines Social Exchange Theory, suggesting that the reciprocal exchange triggered by fair conflict handling is fundamentally socio-emotional rather than calculative. Third, the empirical independence of transformational leadership and conflict-management climate ($r = -0.01$) provides theoretical justification for treating these as distinct organizational resources. This challenges the implicit assumption in some leadership research that transformational leaders inherently manage conflict well; our findings suggest that constructive conflict resolution is a separate organizational capability that can—and should—be developed in tandem with leadership skills to maximize their combined influence.

Practical / Managerial Implications

For HR practitioners and IT managers in Pakistan, the findings translate into several concrete, actionable recommendations. First, leadership development programmes should not be delivered in isolation. Instead, they should be structurally integrated with conflict-resolution training. For example, organisations could design joint workshops where managers practice transformational behaviours (e.g., inspirational communication, individualized coaching) alongside collaborative conflict-handling techniques (e.g., interest-based negotiation, active listening, and problem-solving facilitation). Our results suggest that such integrated training yields substantially higher returns in employee commitment than either component alone. Second, given that the moderation effect is most pronounced for affective commitment, initiatives aimed at building emotional attachment—such as employee recognition programmes, participatory decision-making forums, and team relationship-building activities—should be explicitly reinforced by clear, accessible conflict-resolution mechanisms. Managers should be trained to view disagreements not as threats to be avoided but as opportunities to demonstrate fairness and reinforce trust. Third, organisations currently relying on avoiding or forcing conflict styles should urgently re-evaluate their practices, as our simple-slope analysis indicates that transformational leadership yields only marginal commitment benefits in such climates—essentially wasting the investment in leadership development. Concrete structural changes could include establishing formal peer-mediation channels, scheduling regular team retrospectives to surface and resolve disagreements, and incorporating "conflict-handling effectiveness" into performance appraisals for team leaders. Fourth, since the effect is sector-specific to IT, where project-based teamwork and rapid deadlines heighten interpersonal friction, we recommend that project managers receive specific training in de-escalation techniques and that project charters explicitly define escalation pathways for technical and relational disagreements.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged, each of which points to fruitful avenues for future inquiry.

First, the cross-sectional survey design precludes any definitive causal inferences. Although our theoretical model posits that transformational leadership and conflict management influence commitment, reverse causality or reciprocal effects are equally plausible (e.g., highly committed employees may perceive their leaders and organisational climate more favourably). We strongly encourage future studies to adopt longitudinal panel designs (e.g., three-wave data collection over 12–18 months) or quasi-experimental interventions (e.g., introducing a conflict-

management training programme and tracking commitment pre- and post-intervention) to establish temporal precedence and causal direction.

Second, all measures were obtained from a single respondent (the employee), raising the potential for common-method variance (CMV). Although our Harman's single-factor test and the near-zero correlation between predictor and moderator mitigate this concern, they do not eliminate it. Future research should employ multi-source data collection, for instance, rating transformational leadership via supervisor or peer evaluations, assessing conflict-management climate via HR records or senior management ratings, and obtaining commitment from employees. Additionally, using objective outcomes such as actual turnover rates, absenteeism, or project completion metrics would provide behavioural validation of self-reported commitment.

Third, although all scales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha \geq .71$), the continuance and normative commitment subscales comprised only two items each. While psychometrically adequate for this study, brief scales may not capture the full breadth of these constructs. Future research could employ the full-length versions of the Allen and Meyer (1990) scales (typically six to eight items per sub-dimension) to provide even greater construct coverage and enable more advanced structural equation modeling. However, the acceptable reliability values obtained here mitigate the urgency of this concern.

Fourth, the convenience sampling approach—while yielding a substantial sample ($N = 312$)—relied on a non-probability sampling frame, and we did not report the response rate due to the distribution method. This limits the generalisability of our findings. Future investigations should employ probability sampling techniques (e.g., stratified random sampling across IT sub-sectors and firm sizes) and report detailed response rates and non-response bias analyses. Moreover, our sample was predominantly male (69.6%) and concentrated in the 35–44 age bracket; replications should seek more gender-balanced and age-diverse samples to examine whether these demographic characteristics moderate the observed effects.

Fifth, the study was confined to the Pakistani IT sector. While this contextual specificity is a strength in terms of filling a sectoral gap, it also raises questions about external validity. We invite scholars to replicate our moderated model in other industries (e.g., healthcare, manufacturing, education) and in different cultural and national contexts to determine whether the interaction effect is robust or contingent on cultural dimensions such as power distance, collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance.

Sixth, we did not examine mediating mechanisms. Future research could unpack how constructive conflict management enhances the leadership-commitment link potential mediators include psychological safety, perceived organisational justice, trust in management, and voice climate. Testing such mediated moderation models would provide richer theoretical explanations.

Finally, given the increasing prevalence of hybrid and remote work in Pakistan's IT sector, subsequent studies should investigate whether the moderating role of conflict management differs between co-located and virtual teams, as conflict resolution is inherently more challenging in digital environments.

Conclusion

This study aimed to determine whether conflict management played a moderating role in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee commitment. The data were collected from 312 IT-sector employees in Pakistan. The results revealed that transformational leadership and constructive conflict management were both significant predictors of employee commitment. Moreover, there was an interaction effect of transformational leadership and conflict management on employee commitment, with a higher proportion of it being explained by affective commitment. Overall, it can be concluded that transformational leadership is associated with higher levels of employee commitment through managing conflicts constructively. Thus, with regard to the current findings, human resource departments should invest more effort and resources into developing leadership and conflict resolution strategies to maximize employee commitment rather than focusing on individual elements. Given the acceptable reliability of all measures and the robust moderation effect observed, these findings provide a credible basis for both theoretical advancement and practical intervention. Nevertheless, replication across independent samples and longitudinal designs would further solidify the generalizability of these conclusions.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study provides robust empirical evidence that transformational leadership and constructive conflict management are not merely additive predictors of employee commitment but synergistic drivers. The practical implication is clear: organisations seeking to maximise employee retention and engagement in Pakistan's competitive IT landscape must treat leadership development and conflict-resolution capacity as complementary, co-equal investments. By doing so, they can foster the affective bonds that underpin sustainable organisational performance in an industry defined by rapid change, intense collaboration, and high turnover.

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