

The Relationship Between Leadership Style and Organizational Commitment Among Employees of the Iraqi Ministry of Sport: The Mediating Role of Organizational Justice

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to examine the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment among employees of the Iraqi Ministry of Sport, with organizational justice considered as a mediating variable.

Methods and Materials: This applied, quantitative, descriptive-correlational study was conducted among 300 employees of the Iraqi Ministry of Sport. Data were collected using standardized questionnaires assessing leadership style, organizational justice, and organizational commitment. Leadership style was measured through transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire dimensions, organizational justice through distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions, and organizational commitment through affective, continuance, and normative dimensions. Data were analyzed using SPSS for preliminary analyses and SmartPLS for partial least squares structural equation modeling. The measurement model was evaluated using factor loadings, average variance extracted, composite reliability, and discriminant validity, while the structural model was assessed through path coefficients, bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, coefficients of determination, SRMR, and NFI.

Findings: Leadership style had a significant effect on organizational justice ($p < .001$), and organizational justice had a significant effect on organizational commitment ($p = .004$). However, the direct effect of leadership style on organizational commitment was not statistically significant ($p = .277$). The model explained 48.4% of the variance in organizational justice and 68.5% of the variance in organizational commitment. The SRMR value was .082 and the NFI was .91, indicating acceptable overall model fit. The pattern of significant indirect relationships and nonsignificant direct effects supported the full mediating role of organizational justice in the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that leadership style contributes to employees' organizational commitment primarily through its influence on perceptions of organizational justice, suggesting that fair procedures, equitable treatment, and respectful

managerial interactions are essential mechanisms through which leadership can strengthen commitment among employees of the Iraqi Ministry of Sport.

Keywords: *Leadership Style, Organizational Commitment, Organizational Justice, Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Iraqi Ministry of Sport*

1 Introduction

Organizations increasingly operate in environments characterized by rapid change, heightened accountability, workforce diversity, and growing expectations regarding managerial transparency and employee participation. Under such conditions, leadership is not merely a mechanism for coordinating tasks but a central organizational process through which employees interpret managerial intentions, evaluate organizational practices, and develop attitudes toward their workplace. Leadership style influences how goals are communicated, how employees are motivated, how rewards and responsibilities are distributed, and how organizational decisions are implemented. Consequently, leadership can shape not only employee performance but also perceptions of fairness, trust, attachment, and willingness to remain engaged with the organization. Recent organizational research has therefore moved beyond examining leadership solely as a direct predictor of performance and has increasingly emphasized the psychological and relational mechanisms through which leadership produces its consequences (Gazi et al., 2025; Morais et al., 2024; Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2025).

Leadership style refers to the relatively stable pattern of behaviors through which managers influence, motivate, direct, and interact with their followers. Among the most extensively investigated approaches are transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, the articulation of a compelling vision, and the development of followers beyond immediate contractual expectations. Transactional leadership, in contrast, is primarily based on reciprocal exchanges between leaders and employees, particularly through clarification of expectations, contingent rewards, monitoring, and corrective intervention. Laissez-faire leadership represents a comparatively passive form of leadership characterized by avoidance of decision-making, delayed intervention, and limited supervisory involvement. These styles differ markedly in how they shape employee experiences and therefore may produce different consequences for commitment, trust, justice perceptions, and performance (Çivit & Göncü-Köse, 2024; Lee et al., 2023; Manshor et al., 2024).

The distinction among leadership styles is especially important because employees do not respond merely to formal authority; they respond to the meaning they assign to leadership behavior. Transformational leaders may strengthen employee identification with organizational goals by communicating purpose and recognizing individual contributions, whereas transactional leaders may increase role clarity by connecting performance with expected rewards. Conversely, highly passive leadership can create uncertainty, inconsistent decision-making, and perceptions that employees lack adequate managerial support. Empirical research has repeatedly indicated that different leadership approaches are associated with different levels of organizational commitment and employee behavior, although the strength and direction of these relationships may depend on contextual and psychological mechanisms (Gavya & Subashini, 2024; Oyewobi, 2024; Susanto et al., 2023). This suggests that leadership cannot be evaluated independently from the organizational environment in which employees interpret managerial behavior.

Organizational commitment is one of the most important employee attitudes through which the effects of leadership can become visible. It refers broadly to the psychological bond between employees and their organization and encompasses willingness to remain within the organization, identification with organizational values, acceptance of organizational goals, and readiness to contribute to organizational success. From a multidimensional perspective, organizational commitment includes affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Affective commitment reflects emotional attachment and identification; continuance commitment concerns the perceived costs associated with leaving; and normative commitment represents a sense of obligation to remain. These dimensions indicate that employees may stay in an organization because they want to, because they need to, or because they believe they ought to. The quality of commitment is therefore important, as organizations generally benefit most when employee attachment is rooted in identification, trust, involvement, and perceived value rather than mere necessity (Godbersen et al., 2024; Lo et al., 2024; Salajegheh & Bostan Pira, 2025).

High organizational commitment has been associated with a wide range of favorable organizational consequences. Employees who are committed to their organization are

generally more willing to invest discretionary effort, cooperate with colleagues, maintain service quality, remain involved in organizational activities, and align their behavior with institutional objectives. In service-based and public-sector organizations, these outcomes are particularly important because organizational effectiveness depends heavily on employee interaction, responsiveness, and sustained motivation. Research has demonstrated that organizational commitment can operate as a mechanism connecting leadership with job performance and broader organizational outcomes (Gazi et al., 2025). Similarly, evidence suggests that commitment is closely connected with job involvement and service quality, meaning that the psychological attachment of employees may ultimately affect how effectively organizational services are delivered (Lo et al., 2024). In sport-related administrative organizations, commitment may be particularly important because policy implementation, coordination, planning, and service delivery require cooperation across professional, administrative, and managerial levels (Salajegheh & Bostan Pira, 2025).

Despite the theoretical expectation that effective leadership strengthens employee commitment, empirical findings suggest that this relationship is not always simple or direct. Leadership may influence organizational commitment through intervening processes such as job satisfaction, trust, motivation, engagement, perceived support, or justice. For example, the relationship between leadership styles and employee commitment has been shown to operate partly through job satisfaction (Oyewobi, 2024), while other research has demonstrated that leadership can shape employee outcomes through trust and related relational mechanisms (Lee et al., 2023). Transformational and paternalistic leadership have likewise been associated with organizational commitment through follower needs and work motivation (Çivit & Göncü-Köse, 2024). These findings indicate that leadership behavior becomes consequential when it changes employees' experiences of how the organization treats them, how decisions are made, and how relationships are managed.

One particularly important explanatory mechanism is organizational justice. Organizational justice refers to employees' perceptions of fairness within organizational decision-making, resource allocation, interpersonal treatment, and managerial processes. It is commonly conceptualized through distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions. Distributive justice concerns the perceived fairness of outcomes such as rewards, workload,

promotions, responsibilities, and organizational resources. Procedural justice refers to the fairness, consistency, neutrality, transparency, and accuracy of the procedures through which outcomes are determined. Interactional justice concerns the degree to which employees are treated with dignity, respect, honesty, and adequate explanation during organizational interactions. Collectively, these dimensions reflect whether employees believe that the organization and its representatives treat them fairly in both outcomes and processes (Chen et al., 2024; González-Cánovas et al., 2024; Kim & Yoon, 2024).

Organizational justice is theoretically significant because fairness provides employees with information about their status, value, and security within the organization. When employees perceive that rewards are allocated appropriately, procedures are consistent, and managers interact respectfully, they are more likely to regard the organization as trustworthy and worthy of continued attachment. Conversely, perceptions of unfairness can weaken identification, reduce willingness to cooperate, and stimulate withdrawal or counterproductive behavior. Research has shown that organizational justice can influence employee behavior through organizational commitment, demonstrating that commitment is one of the mechanisms through which fairness affects workplace conduct (Chen et al., 2024). Other evidence has similarly indicated that organizational justice contributes to organizational commitment and that this relationship may be strengthened or shaped by leadership-related factors (Kim & Yoon, 2024). Accordingly, justice is not simply an administrative property; it is an interpretive framework through which employees evaluate whether their relationship with the organization is equitable and sustainable.

Leadership is closely linked to organizational justice because managers frequently act as the most visible representatives of organizational policies and decisions. Employees often experience organizational rules through their supervisors: leaders allocate work, communicate decisions, distribute recognition, interpret procedures, respond to grievances, and determine the interpersonal climate of the workplace. As a result, employees may infer organizational fairness from the conduct of their leaders. A leader who explains decisions clearly, applies rules consistently, recognizes employee contributions, and treats subordinates respectfully can strengthen perceptions of procedural and interactional justice. In contrast, arbitrary decisions, inconsistent treatment, poor communication, and favoritism can generate perceptions of injustice even when

formal organizational regulations appear neutral. This relationship between leadership and justice has been supported in empirical research examining how leadership styles are linked with organizational fairness and employee performance (Khan et al., 2023).

Trust provides another conceptual link between leadership, justice, and commitment. Employees who trust leaders are more likely to interpret organizational decisions as legitimate and to view managerial actions as consistent with organizational values. In this respect, leadership credibility can strengthen perceptions of justice, while justice perceptions can reinforce commitment to the organization. Research examining trust in leadership and perceptions of justice has demonstrated that both factors contribute to employee commitment, indicating that commitment develops not only from organizational incentives but also from employees' judgments concerning the fairness and reliability of those exercising authority (González-Cánovas et al., 2024). Similarly, servant leadership research has shown strong relationships among leadership, commitment to supervisors, and commitment to the wider organization (Godbersen et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the view that leadership behavior shapes commitment through relational processes rather than through authority alone.

Recent studies also suggest that leadership effectiveness increasingly depends on employees' expectations of responsible and ethically consistent organizational conduct. Servant leadership, for instance, has been associated with innovative work behavior through mechanisms such as public service motivation and employee engagement (Amin et al., 2024). Responsible leadership has similarly been connected with organizational citizenship behavior through perceptions and practices related to corporate social responsibility (Sahar et al., 2025). These lines of research demonstrate that employees respond positively when leadership is perceived as socially responsible, supportive, and attentive to collective interests. Although these studies focus on different outcomes, their underlying logic is relevant to organizational justice: employees evaluate leadership partly in terms of whether managers demonstrate fairness, responsibility, transparency, and concern for stakeholders.

The importance of transparency also extends beyond interpersonal management practices. Organizational systems that provide clearer information about rewards, compensation, and performance expectations may influence employee perceptions of fairness and legitimacy. Research

on pay transparency has shown that transparency-related practices can affect productivity and organizational outcomes (Gao et al., 2025). In a broader sense, such evidence suggests that employees' perceptions are shaped not only by the decisions themselves but also by how openly and consistently information is communicated. This is particularly relevant to procedural justice, where transparency and explainability are central to whether organizational processes are perceived as fair.

At the same time, contemporary organizations are increasingly complex systems in which managerial decisions depend on multiple interacting factors. Recent methodological and analytical developments emphasize the importance of examining heterogeneous relationships, differentiated effects, and latent structures rather than assuming that organizational processes operate uniformly across all employees or contexts (Yang et al., 2024). Similarly, new optimization and evaluation approaches highlight the value of examining interdependent factors within integrated systems rather than assessing elements in isolation (Cai & Zhang, 2025). Although such studies emerge from methodological domains beyond conventional organizational behavior, they reinforce an important analytical principle for management research: complex organizational outcomes are often best understood through models that simultaneously examine multiple direct and indirect relationships.

This consideration is particularly relevant to leadership and commitment research. A simple bivariate relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment may conceal the processes through which leadership actually affects employees. Structural models that incorporate mediating constructs can clarify whether leadership has an independent impact or whether its effect depends primarily on changes in employees' perceptions of their organizational environment. Recent studies have increasingly examined mediated pathways linking leadership to commitment, performance, motivation, and employee behavior (Çivit & Göncü-Köse, 2024; Gazi et al., 2025; Oyewobi, 2024). The growing emphasis on mediation reflects recognition that leadership is not an isolated stimulus but part of a broader social and organizational system.

Context is also crucial. Research conducted in different organizational sectors suggests that the relationship between leadership and commitment may vary depending on workforce characteristics, institutional structures, professional expectations, and organizational culture. Studies among nurses have emphasized the role of

leadership styles in fostering organizational commitment within demanding service environments (Gavya & Subashini, 2024). Research in small and medium-sized enterprises has similarly identified meaningful relationships between transformational and transactional leadership and organizational commitment (Manshor et al., 2024). Other studies have shown that leadership and seniority jointly contribute to the explanation of commitment and job satisfaction (Morais et al., 2024). These findings indicate that organizational context and employee characteristics should be considered when evaluating how leadership influences commitment.

The public-sector context adds another layer of complexity. Public institutions are often characterized by formalized procedures, hierarchical structures, regulatory constraints, and high expectations of fairness and accountability. Employees in such organizations may be especially sensitive to consistency in decision-making, equitable resource allocation, promotion procedures, communication, and managerial conduct. Global research on governance and responsibility has emphasized the importance of credible organizational systems and socially responsible practices in sustaining performance within complex institutional environments (Yongsheng & Yingquan, 2025). Although public-sector ministries differ from supply-chain organizations, the underlying governance principle remains relevant: organizational effectiveness depends partly on whether structures, decisions, and leadership practices are viewed as legitimate and responsible by key stakeholders, including employees.

The Ministry of Sport represents a particularly important context because its employees operate at the intersection of administration, public policy, organizational coordination, and sport development. Their commitment can directly influence continuity of programs, quality of administrative processes, cooperation among departments, and implementation of sport-related policies. Evidence from physical education organizations has demonstrated that organizational commitment is associated with employee functioning and positive organizational outcomes (Salajegheh & Bostan Pira, 2025). In such settings, leadership practices that foster fairness and employee attachment may contribute to organizational stability and effectiveness. Conversely, leadership practices perceived as inconsistent, opaque, or inequitable may weaken commitment even when employees remain formally employed.

Employee characteristics also influence how leadership is perceived. Contemporary organizational research increasingly recognizes that emotional, cultural, and interpersonal capabilities can affect how individuals interpret and respond to organizational environments. Research on emotional and cultural intelligence has demonstrated that personal and contextual competencies interact in complex ways in determining successful adaptation and performance (Li et al., 2025). This observation is relevant to leadership research because employees may differ in their expectations of managerial behavior and fairness. Nevertheless, while individual differences matter, organizational leadership and justice remain modifiable institutional factors over which managers can exert meaningful influence.

Organizational commitment is likewise connected to broader psychological and behavioral outcomes beyond simple retention. Commitment can strengthen involvement, improve service-related behavior, and reduce counterproductive responses. The relationship between justice and commitment is therefore particularly important because perceived fairness may transform managerial practices into durable psychological attachment. In the context of organizational injustice, employees may disengage, reduce discretionary effort, or develop withdrawal behaviors. Evidence showing that justice perceptions affect social loafing through organizational commitment illustrates this mechanism directly (Chen et al., 2024). Conversely, when fairness is combined with supportive and credible leadership, employees are more likely to develop stronger attachment and constructive work attitudes (González-Cánovas et al., 2024; Kim & Yoon, 2024).

Taken together, previous research provides strong evidence that leadership style, organizational justice, and organizational commitment are closely interconnected, yet important gaps remain. First, much of the literature has examined direct relationships between leadership and commitment without fully specifying the intervening mechanisms that translate leadership behavior into employee attachment. Second, studies conducted in healthcare, higher education, SMEs, and other organizational contexts may not be directly generalizable to governmental sport institutions (Gavya & Subashini, 2024; Khan et al., 2023; Manshor et al., 2024). Third, research increasingly demonstrates that mediated organizational processes are context-sensitive, suggesting a need to test integrated models within specific institutional environments

(Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2025). Finally, the Iraqi public sport sector has received comparatively limited empirical attention regarding the combined effects of leadership style, organizational justice, and organizational commitment.

Examining these relationships within the Iraqi Ministry of Sport is therefore both theoretically and practically important. Theoretically, testing organizational justice as a mediator can clarify whether leadership contributes to commitment directly or primarily by shaping employees' fairness perceptions. Practically, distinguishing these pathways can help administrators identify more precise managerial interventions. If leadership affects commitment largely through organizational justice, merely encouraging managers to adopt particular leadership behaviors may be insufficient unless those behaviors are translated into fair procedures, equitable treatment, transparent decision-making, and respectful interactions. Such evidence would provide a stronger basis for leadership development, human resource policy, and organizational reform within the Ministry.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment among employees of the Iraqi Ministry of Sport, with organizational justice considered as a mediating variable.

2 Methods and Materials

The present study employed a quantitative, applied, descriptive-correlational research design to investigate the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment among employees of the Iraqi Ministry of Sport, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of organizational justice. From the perspective of purpose, the study was considered applied research because its findings were intended to provide practical evidence for improving managerial practices, strengthening perceptions of organizational justice, and enhancing employees' organizational commitment within the Ministry of Sport. In terms of methodology, the study followed a cross-sectional survey design because data on leadership style, organizational justice, and organizational commitment were collected from employees at a single period using standardized self-report questionnaires. A correlational approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to determine the magnitude and direction of relationships among the study constructs rather than experimentally manipulating the variables. Structural

equation modeling was adopted as the principal analytical framework because it permits the simultaneous examination of multiple relationships among latent constructs and provides a suitable method for estimating both direct and indirect effects. Accordingly, the conceptual model examined the direct relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment, the relationship between leadership style and organizational justice, the relationship between organizational justice and organizational commitment, and the indirect relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment through organizational justice. This analytical strategy made it possible to evaluate the hypothesized relationships within a single integrated model rather than examining each relationship independently.

The statistical population consisted of all employees working at the Iraqi Ministry of Sport, comprising approximately 300 individuals. The population included employees working under different employment arrangements and across administrative, operational, professional, and managerial units of the Ministry. Employees at different organizational levels, including managers, professional experts, and administrative personnel, were included because perceptions of leadership practices, organizational justice, and organizational commitment may differ according to organizational position and work responsibilities. Inclusion of employees from different occupational levels was therefore considered important for obtaining a comprehensive representation of organizational experiences within the Ministry. Employees were eligible to participate if they were actively employed by the Ministry during the period of data collection, had sufficient experience within the organization to evaluate leadership and organizational practices, and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Questionnaires that were substantially incomplete or contained response patterns that prevented valid statistical analysis were considered unsuitable for inclusion in the final dataset.

To ensure representation of the major occupational groups within the Ministry, proportionate stratified random sampling was used in the data collection process. The statistical population was first classified into relevant occupational strata, including managers, professional experts, and administrative employees. Participants within each stratum were then approached in accordance with the relative size of that occupational group in the overall population. This procedure was intended to minimize sampling bias and ensure that the perspectives of employees

at different organizational levels were adequately represented. Attention was also given to achieving reasonable diversity in demographic and occupational characteristics such as gender, age, educational attainment, length of service, and organizational position. Given the relatively limited population size and the need for adequate statistical power for structural equation modeling, questionnaires were distributed broadly across the target population, and the final dataset comprised 300 usable responses. This sample size was considered adequate for the proposed structural equation modeling analysis and provided sufficient observations for estimating the measurement and structural components of the conceptual model.

The research was conducted in accordance with standard ethical principles for organizational survey research. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the general purpose of the study before completing the questionnaires. They were assured that the information obtained would be used exclusively for research purposes and that their individual responses would remain confidential. No personally identifying information was required for the statistical analyses. Participants were also informed that they could decline participation or discontinue questionnaire completion without any occupational consequences. These procedures were intended to reduce evaluation apprehension and encourage employees to provide accurate assessments of leadership behavior, organizational justice, and their commitment to the organization.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of a demographic section and standardized measures of the three principal research constructs. The demographic section obtained information regarding respondents' gender, age, educational attainment, length of organizational service, and occupational position. These variables were used primarily to describe the characteristics of the study sample and provide an organizational profile of the respondents. The second part of the questionnaire included standardized items assessing leadership style, organizational justice, and organizational commitment. Responses to the study items were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores generally indicating a greater presence or stronger perception of the construct being assessed. Scores for the principal constructs and their respective dimensions were derived from the corresponding

questionnaire items and subsequently used in descriptive analyses and structural equation modeling.

Leadership style was assessed using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio. The instrument contained 40 items designed to evaluate employees' perceptions of leadership behaviors within the organization. In accordance with the conceptualization adopted in the present study, leadership style was represented through three major dimensions: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership. The transformational leadership component consisted of 27 items and reflected leadership behaviors directed toward inspiring employees, developing a shared organizational vision, stimulating employees intellectually, providing individualized attention, and motivating followers to perform beyond conventional expectations. The transactional leadership component consisted of eight items and assessed leadership behaviors based primarily on exchanges between leaders and employees, including clarification of expectations, contingent rewards, and managerial responses to performance. The laissez-faire component consisted of five items and represented a relatively passive leadership orientation characterized by limited managerial intervention, delayed decision-making, or avoidance of active leadership responsibilities. The MLQ has been extensively used in organizational and leadership research, and previous applications have generally demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency across its major dimensions.

Organizational justice was assessed using the 20-item Organizational Justice Questionnaire developed by Niehoff and Moorman in 1993. The instrument evaluates employees' perceptions of fairness within the organization and encompasses distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Distributive justice refers to employees' perceptions regarding the fairness of organizational outcomes, including rewards, responsibilities, workload, and other resources distributed among organizational members. Procedural justice concerns the perceived fairness, consistency, accuracy, and impartiality of the procedures used to make organizational decisions and allocate outcomes. Interactional justice represents the quality and fairness of interpersonal treatment received by employees during the implementation of decisions and organizational procedures, including perceptions of respect, dignity, adequate explanations, and appropriate communication. These three components collectively provided an overall representation of organizational justice in the proposed model. Previous

research using this instrument has reported acceptable reliability coefficients for its different dimensions, supporting its suitability for assessing employees' perceptions of organizational fairness.

Organizational commitment was measured using the 24-item organizational commitment questionnaire developed by Meyer and Allen. The questionnaire conceptualizes organizational commitment as a multidimensional construct consisting of affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Affective commitment represents employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization and reflects the degree to which employees remain because they genuinely wish to maintain organizational membership. Continuance commitment reflects awareness of the perceived costs associated with leaving the organization and therefore represents commitment arising partly from the practical consequences of organizational departure. Normative commitment refers to employees' perceived moral obligation or sense of responsibility to remain with the organization. Evaluation of these three dimensions provided a comprehensive assessment of employees' psychological attachment and commitment to the Iraqi Ministry of Sport. Previous studies using the Meyer and Allen instrument have reported satisfactory internal consistency for the three dimensions, supporting its application in organizational research.

Because the instruments used in the study were standardized measures with established applications in previous organizational studies, their underlying theoretical content and dimensional structures had already received substantial empirical support. Nevertheless, measurement properties were reassessed using data obtained from the current sample before testing the structural relationships. Construct validity was evaluated within the structural equation modeling framework by examining the measurement model. Indicator loadings were inspected to determine whether individual items adequately represented their intended latent constructs. Convergent validity was evaluated using the average variance extracted (AVE), with values of approximately .50 or higher interpreted as evidence that a latent construct explained an adequate proportion of the variance in its indicators. Discriminant validity was assessed by examining whether empirically distinct constructs demonstrated sufficient statistical separation. The Fornell–Larcker criterion was considered for this purpose, and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) was additionally examined where

appropriate. These procedures were particularly important because leadership style, organizational justice, and organizational commitment are theoretically related organizational constructs and therefore require evidence that each construct captures a distinguishable domain despite their expected correlations.

Reliability of the measurement instruments in the current sample was evaluated using both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Cronbach's alpha was used as an indicator of internal consistency among items assigned to each construct or dimension, whereas composite reliability was assessed within the structural equation modeling framework to provide an additional estimate of construct reliability based on the contribution of the observed indicators. Reliability coefficients of approximately .70 or higher were regarded as indicative of satisfactory internal consistency. The simultaneous consideration of indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity criteria provided a comprehensive assessment of the adequacy of the measurement model prior to interpretation of the structural relationships.

In operational terms, leadership style constituted the independent variable, organizational justice represented the mediating variable, and organizational commitment constituted the dependent variable. Leadership style was operationalized through employees' responses to the MLQ dimensions of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. Organizational justice was operationalized through employees' scores on distributive, procedural, and interactional justice, whereas organizational commitment was operationalized through affective, continuance, and normative commitment scores. The resulting scores constituted the empirical indicators through which the conceptual relationships among the three principal variables were examined.

Data analysis was conducted in successive descriptive, measurement, and structural stages. Initially, completed questionnaires were screened for completeness, response consistency, and suitability for statistical analysis. The data were then coded and entered into SPSS for preliminary processing and descriptive statistical analysis. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to describe categorical demographic characteristics, including gender, educational attainment, and occupational position, whereas means and standard deviations were calculated for quantitative or scale-based variables. Descriptive statistics were also calculated for leadership style, organizational justice, organizational

commitment, and their respective dimensions to provide an initial overview of the distribution and central tendency of the study variables. Prior to structural model estimation, the dataset was inspected for potential data-entry errors, missing information, and problematic response patterns that could adversely affect subsequent analyses.

The hypothesized model was examined using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS. This analytical approach was selected because the study involved several multidimensional latent constructs and sought to estimate multiple relationships simultaneously, including a theoretically important mediation pathway. The analysis proceeded through two principal stages consisting of assessment of the measurement model and evaluation of the structural model. Evaluation of the measurement model focused on establishing the reliability and validity of the constructs before interpreting relationships among them. Indicator factor loadings were examined to determine the contribution of individual questionnaire items to their corresponding constructs. Internal consistency reliability was assessed through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, while convergent validity was evaluated using average variance extracted. Discriminant validity was investigated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and, where appropriate, the HTMT ratio. Only after establishing an acceptable measurement model were the hypothesized structural relationships evaluated.

Assessment of the structural model focused on the magnitude, direction, and statistical significance of the hypothesized path coefficients. The direct effect of leadership style on organizational commitment was examined to determine whether leadership behavior was associated with employees' psychological attachment to the organization. The path from leadership style to organizational justice was tested to establish whether employees' perceptions of managerial leadership were associated with their perceptions of fairness within the Ministry. The direct relationship between organizational justice and organizational commitment was then examined to determine whether stronger perceptions of distributive, procedural, and interactional fairness were associated with higher organizational commitment. The explanatory performance of the structural model was additionally considered through appropriate PLS-SEM criteria, including the variance explained in endogenous constructs and relevant predictive indicators where applicable.

Particular attention was given to testing the mediating role of organizational justice in the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment. The mediation analysis assessed whether leadership style influenced organizational commitment indirectly through its association with employees' perceptions of organizational justice. The indirect effect was therefore estimated as the product of the path from leadership style to organizational justice and the path from organizational justice to organizational commitment. Bootstrapping procedures in SmartPLS were used to evaluate the statistical significance of direct and indirect path coefficients because bootstrapping does not require the indirect effect to follow a normal sampling distribution and is particularly appropriate for mediation testing in PLS-SEM. The significance of the indirect pathway was examined together with the direct effect of leadership style on organizational commitment to determine whether the pattern of results supported a mediating mechanism. Accordingly, organizational justice was considered to demonstrate a meaningful mediating role when the bootstrapped indirect effect was statistically significant.

The overall interpretation of the structural model was based on the estimated path coefficients, their statistical significance, the explanatory power of the endogenous constructs, and relevant model-quality criteria provided by SmartPLS. Statistical decisions were made using a significance level of .05. The combination of descriptive analysis in SPSS and measurement and structural modeling in SmartPLS enabled the study to assess not only whether leadership style, organizational justice, and organizational commitment were associated, but also how these variables operated simultaneously within an integrated explanatory model. This approach was particularly suitable for the objective of the study because it permitted a direct empirical examination of the proposition that employees' perceptions of organizational fairness constitute an important mechanism through which leadership practices may contribute to organizational commitment among employees of the Iraqi Ministry of Sport.

3 Findings and Results

The final analysis was conducted on data from 300 employees of the Iraqi Ministry of Sport. Regarding gender, 180 participants (60.0%) were men and 120 (40.0%) were women. In terms of age, 24 employees (8.0%) were younger than 30 years, 156 (52.0%) were between 30 and 40 years,

84 (28.0%) were between 40 and 50 years, and 36 (12.0%) were older than 50 years, indicating that the largest proportion of participants belonged to the 30–40-year age group. Regarding educational attainment, 12 participants (4.0%) held a bachelor's degree, 240 (80.0%) held a master's degree, and 48 (16.0%) held a doctoral degree, demonstrating a relatively highly educated workforce. With respect to organizational tenure, 84 employees (28.0%) had less than 5 years of service, 84 (28.0%) had between 5 and 10 years, 24 (8.0%) had between 10 and 15 years, and 108 (36.0%) had more than 15 years of service. Finally, in terms of organizational position, 156 participants (52.0%) were administrative employees, 60 (20.0%) were professional experts, and 84 (28.0%) held managerial positions. Overall, the sample represented employees from different age groups, levels of organizational experience, educational backgrounds, and occupational positions, thereby providing a relatively broad representation of the workforce within the Ministry.

Descriptive analysis of the principal study variables and their dimensions showed noticeable differences in employees' perceptions of leadership behaviors, organizational justice, and organizational commitment. As presented in Table 1, transformational leadership obtained the highest mean among the leadership dimensions ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.68$), followed closely by transactional leadership ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.72$). In contrast, laissez-faire leadership showed a considerably lower mean ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 0.75$). Specifically, 44% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements representing transformational leadership, whereas 36% provided neutral responses and 20% disagreed or strongly disagreed. For transactional leadership, 48% expressed agreement, compared with 24% neutral and 28% negative responses. Laissez-faire leadership demonstrated a distinctly different pattern, with 64% of participants disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with related

items and only 20% expressing agreement. These results suggest that leadership within the Ministry was characterized predominantly by transformational and transactional behaviors, whereas passive or non-interventionist leadership was considerably less prevalent.

Among the dimensions of organizational justice, interactional justice demonstrated the highest mean ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.65$), with 70% of employees expressing agreement or strong agreement. Distributive justice also received relatively favorable evaluations ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.69$), with 60% positive responses. Procedural justice, however, had the lowest mean among the justice dimensions ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.80$); only 40% of respondents reported favorable perceptions, while 30% remained neutral and 30% expressed disagreement. Therefore, although interpersonal treatment and the perceived distribution of organizational outcomes were generally evaluated positively, employees demonstrated comparatively greater reservations concerning the transparency, consistency, and fairness of organizational procedures.

The pattern for organizational commitment was also generally favorable. Affective commitment showed the highest mean ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.66$), and 65% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the associated items. Normative commitment ranked second ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.70$), with 55% positive responses, whereas continuance commitment showed the lowest mean ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.74$), with 45% favorable responses. This pattern indicates that employees' organizational attachment was more strongly characterized by emotional identification and a sense of belonging than by perceived costs associated with leaving the organization. Taken together, the descriptive findings indicate relatively favorable organizational justice and organizational commitment, while leadership practices, particularly transformational leadership, still exhibited room for further strengthening.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Dimensions of Leadership Style, Organizational Justice, and Organizational Commitment

Construct and Dimension	M	SD	Agree/Strongly Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/Strongly Disagree (%)
Leadership Style					
Transformational leadership	3.28	0.68	44	36	20
Transactional leadership	3.24	0.72	48	24	28
Laissez-faire leadership	2.24	0.75	20	16	64
Organizational Justice					
Distributive justice	3.70	0.69	60	24	16
Procedural justice	3.10	0.80	40	30	30
Interactional justice	3.90	0.65	70	20	10
Organizational Commitment					

Affective commitment	3.85	0.66	65	20	15
Continuance commitment	3.30	0.74	45	30	25
Normative commitment	3.50	0.70	55	25	20

Before assessment of the measurement and structural models, the quality of the dataset was examined. Skewness and kurtosis coefficients were calculated for all study variables in SPSS. All coefficients fell within the acceptable range of -2 to $+2$, indicating that no substantial departure from approximate normality was evident. Although strict multivariate normality is not a prerequisite for partial least squares structural equation modeling, this preliminary assessment supported the suitability of the dataset for subsequent analysis. Following initial data screening, the dataset was transferred to SmartPLS for assessment of the measurement model and testing of the hypothesized structural relationships.

The initial measurement model consisted of three latent constructs: leadership style (LS), organizational justice (OJ), and organizational commitment (OC). Leadership style was represented by 12 indicators coded LS1 through LS12, including reverse-worded items among the final indicators. The reverse-scored leadership items were recoded in SPSS before transfer to SmartPLS so that all indicators followed a consistent scoring direction. Organizational commitment and organizational justice were initially represented by nine indicators each, coded OC1–OC9 and OJ1–OJ9, respectively. The initial measurement model was examined using the outer loadings of the indicators. Indicators with inadequate loadings were removed progressively rather than simultaneously so that the effect of each removal on construct reliability, convergent validity, and conceptual coverage could be evaluated.

The initial assessment identified several indicators with factor loadings below .60. These included LSR100, OC4, OC5, OC6, OJ6, and OJ8, which were removed because of their weak contribution to their respective latent constructs and their unfavorable influence on measurement quality. Indicators with loadings between .60 and .70, including OJ9

and OC9, were evaluated more cautiously. These indicators were retained when their removal did not improve the measurement properties sufficiently to justify the corresponding loss of conceptual information. After each deletion, the measurement model was re-estimated, and reliability and validity indices were reassessed. The iterative refinement process continued until all remaining indicators demonstrated acceptable measurement properties while each construct retained an adequate number of indicators and satisfactory theoretical coverage.

Convergent validity was assessed through the average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE values were .687 for leadership style, .624 for organizational commitment, and .590 for organizational justice. Because all values exceeded the recommended threshold of .50, each construct explained more than half of the variance in its retained indicators on average, supporting convergent validity. Composite reliability values were .960 for leadership style, .907 for organizational commitment, and .909 for organizational justice, all substantially exceeding the conventional threshold of .70 and therefore indicating strong internal consistency. The combined results of indicator refinement, AVE, and composite reliability demonstrated that the final measurement model possessed satisfactory measurement quality.

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The square root of the AVE was .829 for leadership style, .790 for organizational commitment, and .768 for organizational justice. The correlation between leadership style and organizational commitment was .691, while the correlation between leadership style and organizational justice was .696. Organizational commitment and organizational justice exhibited a stronger correlation of .808. The measurement-quality statistics and construct correlations are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Measurement Model Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Fornell–Larcker Statistics

Construct	AVE	CR	LS	OC	OJ
Leadership Style (LS)	.687	.960	.829		
Organizational Commitment (OC)	.624	.907	.691	.790	
Organizational Justice (OJ)	.590	.909	.696	.808	.768

The measurement model therefore demonstrated satisfactory convergent validity and high composite reliability. The Fornell–Larcker comparison supported clear differentiation of leadership style from the other constructs because the square root of its AVE (.829) exceeded its correlations with organizational commitment (.691) and organizational justice (.696). The reported results also indicated satisfactory measurement performance of the retained organizational commitment and organizational justice indicators after purification of the model. Nevertheless, the correlation between organizational commitment and organizational justice was particularly strong, indicating a close empirical relationship between employees' fairness perceptions and organizational attachment.

Following evaluation of the measurement model, the structural model was examined to test the relationships among leadership style, organizational justice, and organizational commitment. Statistical significance was assessed using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples in

SmartPLS. The analysis demonstrated that the path from leadership style to organizational justice was statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicating that leadership style was significantly associated with employees' perceptions of fairness within the Ministry. The path from organizational justice to organizational commitment was also statistically significant ($p = .004$), supporting a significant association between greater perceptions of justice and stronger organizational commitment. In contrast, the direct path from leadership style to organizational commitment did not reach statistical significance ($p = .277$).

Accordingly, the first subsidiary hypothesis, which proposed a significant direct relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment, was not supported. The second subsidiary hypothesis, proposing a significant relationship between leadership style and organizational justice, was supported. The third subsidiary hypothesis, proposing a significant relationship between organizational justice and organizational commitment, was also supported. These results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Structural Relationships and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesized Relationship	p	Significance	Decision
Leadership Style → Organizational Commitment	.277	Not significant	Not supported
Leadership Style → Organizational Justice	< .001	Significant	Supported
Organizational Justice → Organizational Commitment	.004	Significant	Supported

The explanatory capacity of the structural model was subsequently assessed using the coefficients of determination. The R^2 value for organizational justice was .484, demonstrating that leadership style explained 48.4% of the variance in employees' perceptions of organizational justice. This represents a meaningful level of explanatory power for organizational justice. The R^2 value for organizational commitment was .685, indicating that leadership style and organizational justice jointly explained 68.5% of the variance in organizational commitment. The model therefore demonstrated substantial explanatory capacity for the principal dependent construct.

Model fit was further assessed using the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and normed fit index (NFI). The SRMR value was .082, which falls within the commonly accepted range for PLS-SEM models when values below approximately .08 to .10 are considered acceptable. The NFI was .91, indicating satisfactory fit relative to the corresponding baseline model. Taken together, the R^2 , SRMR, and NFI results suggested that the proposed

structural model provided an acceptable representation of the observed data and possessed adequate explanatory capability.

The primary hypothesis concerned the mediating role of organizational justice in the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment. The bootstrapping-based structural analysis demonstrated a significant path from leadership style to organizational justice and a significant path from organizational justice to organizational commitment, whereas the remaining direct relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment was not statistically significant. This configuration indicates that the association between leadership style and organizational commitment operates principally through employees' perceptions of organizational justice. In other words, leadership practices appear to contribute to organizational commitment insofar as they shape perceptions of fairness within the organization.

Because the indirect mechanism through organizational justice was supported while the direct leadership style–

organizational commitment pathway was nonsignificant, the mediation pattern was interpreted as full mediation in the specified model. Thus, organizational justice constituted the principal mechanism through which leadership style was associated with organizational commitment among

employees of the Iraqi Ministry of Sport. The principal structural and mediation findings, together with the explanatory and fit indices of the model, are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Summary of Structural Model Explanatory Power, Fit, and Mediation Results

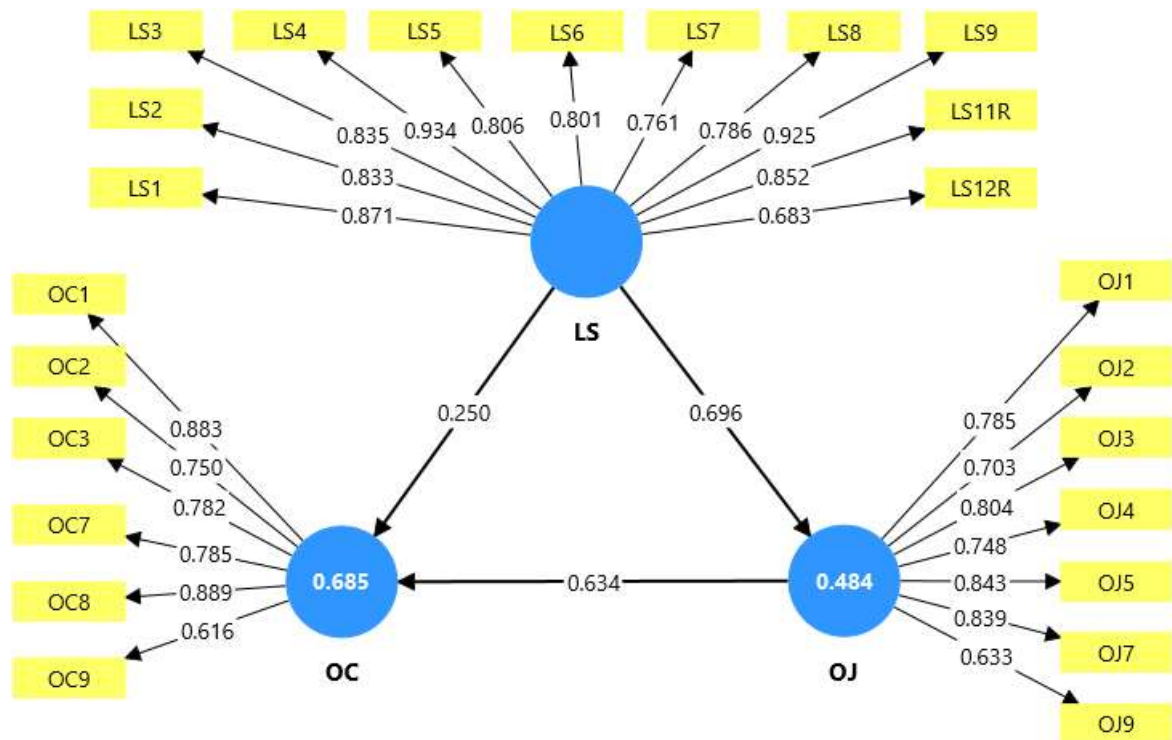
Assessment	Result	Interpretation
R ² for Organizational Justice	.484	48.4% of variance explained by leadership style
R ² for Organizational Commitment	.685	68.5% of variance explained by predictors in the model
SRMR	.082	Acceptable model fit
NFI	.910	Satisfactory model fit
LS → OJ	$p < .001$	Significant
OJ → OC	$p = .004$	Significant
LS → OC	$p = .277$	Not significant
Mediating role of OJ	Supported	Full mediation
Main hypothesis	Supported	Organizational justice mediates the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the proposed model had satisfactory measurement properties and adequate structural explanatory power. Employees reported relatively favorable perceptions of organizational justice and organizational commitment, with interactional justice and affective commitment emerging as the strongest dimensions of their respective constructs. Transformational leadership was the most prominent leadership dimension, whereas laissez-faire leadership was comparatively uncommon. At the structural level, leadership style significantly predicted

organizational justice, and organizational justice significantly predicted organizational commitment; however, leadership style did not have a statistically significant direct relationship with organizational commitment after organizational justice was incorporated into the model. Consequently, the main hypothesis of the study was supported, indicating that organizational justice fully mediates the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment among employees of the Iraqi Ministry of Sport.

Figure 1

Model with Factor Loadings



4 Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment among employees of the Iraqi Ministry of Sport, with organizational justice considered as a mediating variable. The findings demonstrated that leadership style had a significant positive relationship with organizational justice, organizational justice had a significant positive relationship with organizational commitment, and the direct relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment was not statistically significant after organizational justice was incorporated into the structural model. The pattern of direct and indirect relationships therefore supported the mediating role of organizational justice and indicated that organizational justice functioned as a full mediator in the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment. In addition, the structural model explained 48.4% of the variance in organizational justice and 68.5% of the variance in organizational commitment, demonstrating substantial explanatory capacity. The model also showed acceptable overall fit, with an SRMR of .082 and an NFI of .91. These findings suggest that leadership practices are important for employee commitment primarily when such practices translate into stronger perceptions of fairness, equitable treatment, transparent procedures, and respectful organizational interactions.

The first important finding was that leadership style significantly predicted employees' perceptions of organizational justice. This result indicates that employees' judgments regarding fairness are closely influenced by how managers behave, communicate, distribute responsibilities, respond to employees, and implement organizational procedures. Leaders are among the most visible representatives of the organization, and employees frequently interpret organizational practices through their everyday interactions with supervisors and managers. When leaders apply rules consistently, explain decisions, communicate respectfully, and recognize employee contributions, employees are more likely to perceive the organizational environment as fair. Conversely, inconsistent managerial behavior, weak communication, favoritism, or inadequate explanations may undermine perceptions of justice even when formal organizational policies appear equitable.

This finding is consistent with the results of Khan et al., who showed that organizational justice plays an important role in linking leadership styles with employee-related outcomes and demonstrated that leadership practices can substantially shape employees' fairness perceptions (Khan et al., 2023). It is also in accordance with González-Cánovas et al., who emphasized the close relationship among trust in leadership, perceptions of justice, and employee commitment (González-Cánovas et al., 2024). From this

perspective, leadership contributes to organizational justice because employees evaluate not only what managers decide but also how those decisions are made and communicated. The finding also corresponds with research emphasizing relational characteristics of leadership. Godbersen et al. demonstrated that servant leadership is closely related to employees' commitment both to supervisors and to the organization (Godbersen et al., 2024), while Amin et al. showed that supportive forms of leadership can generate favorable employee behaviors through motivational and engagement-related mechanisms (Amin et al., 2024). Together, these studies support the interpretation that leadership becomes organizationally meaningful when it influences employees' perceptions of how they are valued and treated.

The descriptive findings also showed that transformational leadership had the highest mean among the leadership dimensions, whereas laissez-faire leadership had the lowest mean. This pattern suggests that employees generally perceived their managers as more likely to demonstrate active, motivating, and exchange-oriented behaviors than passive or avoidant leadership. The prominence of transformational leadership is important because transformational leaders typically communicate organizational purpose, encourage employee development, and promote a stronger sense of collective identity. Nevertheless, its mean remained moderate rather than exceptionally high, suggesting that transformational behaviors were present but not completely institutionalized throughout the Ministry. This interpretation is supported by studies showing that transformational and transactional leadership are frequently associated with more favorable organizational attitudes than passive leadership styles (Gavya & Subashini, 2024; Manshor et al., 2024). Nanjundeswaraswamy et al. similarly emphasized that differences in leadership styles are associated with differences in employee commitment, reinforcing the importance of leadership dynamics for organizational attitudes (Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2025). Likewise, Çivit and Göncü-Köse showed that transformational leadership can influence commitment through employee needs and motivational processes (Çivit & Göncü-Köse, 2024). Therefore, the relatively stronger presence of transformational leadership in the Iraqi Ministry of Sport may provide an important foundation for developing perceptions of organizational fairness.

The second major finding was that organizational justice significantly predicted organizational commitment.

Employees who perceived greater fairness in organizational outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatment were more likely to demonstrate stronger attachment to the Ministry. This finding can be explained through the reciprocal nature of the employee–organization relationship. When employees perceive that the organization allocates resources fairly, makes decisions through transparent and consistent procedures, and treats them with dignity and respect, they are more likely to interpret the organization as supportive and trustworthy. Such experiences can increase employees' willingness to identify with the organization and maintain membership in it. In contrast, perceived injustice may weaken attachment because employees can interpret unfair treatment as evidence that their contribution is insufficiently valued.

The finding is strongly aligned with Chen et al., who demonstrated that organizational justice perceptions are associated with organizational commitment and that commitment serves as an important mechanism through which fairness influences employee behavior (Chen et al., 2024). Similarly, Kim and Youn reported a meaningful positive effect of organizational justice on organizational commitment and showed that leadership characteristics can further shape this relationship (Kim & Youn, 2024). González-Cánovas et al. likewise demonstrated that justice perceptions are fundamental for fostering employee commitment, particularly when combined with trust in leadership (González-Cánovas et al., 2024). These studies collectively support the proposition that employees become more committed when they perceive organizational decisions and interpersonal exchanges as legitimate and fair.

The descriptive findings regarding organizational justice provide additional insight into this relationship. Interactional justice showed the highest mean, followed by distributive justice, whereas procedural justice had the lowest mean. This pattern indicates that employees were generally satisfied with interpersonal respect and treatment and were relatively positive about the distribution of outcomes, but were less favorable regarding the procedures through which organizational decisions were made. This distinction is important because employees may perceive their direct interactions with managers positively while simultaneously questioning broader procedures involving participation, consistency, transparency, or decision-making. Thus, strengthening procedural justice may represent one of the most important mechanisms for improving overall justice perceptions within the Ministry. This interpretation is compatible with research demonstrating that transparency

and access to organizational information can affect employee responses and productivity (Gao et al., 2025). Although Gao et al. focused specifically on pay transparency, the broader implication is that employees respond positively when organizational decisions are understandable and information concerning those decisions is accessible.

The third major finding concerned the direct relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment. Contrary to the corresponding subsidiary hypothesis, the direct effect of leadership style on organizational commitment was not statistically significant. This finding indicates that leadership behavior alone was insufficient to explain employees' organizational commitment once organizational justice was included in the model. In other words, leadership did not appear to strengthen commitment automatically; instead, its influence depended on whether employees perceived leadership-related actions as creating a fair organizational environment. This is an important finding because it qualifies the frequently reported positive association between leadership and commitment.

Some previous studies have found more direct relationships between leadership style and organizational commitment. Gavya and Subashini demonstrated that leadership styles were important in fostering organizational commitment among nurses (Gavya & Subashini, 2024), and Manshor et al. reported significant relationships between transformational and transactional leadership and organizational commitment (Manshor et al., 2024). Morais et al. also identified leadership as an important predictor of organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Morais et al., 2024), while Nanjundeswaraswamy et al. emphasized a meaningful nexus between different leadership styles and employee commitment (Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2025). The apparent difference between these studies and the present findings may be explained by the inclusion of organizational justice as a mediator. When justice is omitted, leadership may display a significant total association with commitment; however, when the mechanism through which leadership operates is explicitly modeled, the direct effect may diminish or become nonsignificant.

This interpretation is supported by studies showing that the influence of leadership frequently operates through intermediate psychological and organizational mechanisms. Oyewobi found that job satisfaction mediated the relationship between leadership styles and employee commitment (Oyewobi, 2024). Çivit and Göncü-Köse similarly demonstrated that leadership can affect

organizational commitment through follower needs and multidimensional work motivations (Çivit & Göncü-Köse, 2024). Lee et al. showed that trust acts as an important mediator linking leader emotional intelligence and leadership styles with employee outcomes (Lee et al., 2023). Gazi et al. further demonstrated that organizational commitment itself can function as an intervening mechanism linking leadership style with performance (Gazi et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the broader argument that leadership effects are often transmitted through employees' interpretations, motivations, relationships, and workplace experiences rather than through a simple direct pathway.

The most important finding of the present study was therefore the full mediating role of organizational justice. Leadership style significantly predicted organizational justice, justice significantly predicted organizational commitment, but the remaining direct effect of leadership on commitment was nonsignificant. This pattern suggests that employees do not necessarily become committed simply because managers demonstrate particular leadership characteristics. Instead, leadership contributes to commitment when employees experience the consequences of leadership as fair. Transformational behaviors such as inspiration and individualized consideration, or transactional behaviors such as contingent rewards and clear expectations, may strengthen commitment only when employees believe that these practices are applied impartially and transparently. Therefore, organizational justice appears to transform leadership behaviors into a psychologically meaningful employee experience.

This mediating mechanism is closely aligned with the findings of Khan et al., who emphasized organizational justice as an explanatory link between leadership styles and employee outcomes (Khan et al., 2023). It also extends the findings of González-Cánovas et al., who demonstrated that leadership-related trust and perceptions of justice jointly foster employee commitment (González-Cánovas et al., 2024). Kim and Youn further showed that organizational justice contributes to commitment while leadership-related variables influence this process (Kim & Youn, 2024). Thus, the present findings add support to a relational interpretation of organizational commitment in which leadership is effective not merely because of what leaders do, but because of the fairness meanings employees attach to managerial behavior.

The findings may also be understood in relation to contemporary perspectives on responsible and employee-centered leadership. Sahar et al. showed that responsible

leadership can promote desirable organizational citizenship behavior through mechanisms involving perceived organizational responsibility (Sahar et al., 2025). Amin et al. similarly found that servant leadership facilitates innovative employee behavior through public service motivation and employee engagement (Amin et al., 2024). Although these studies examined different mediators and outcomes, they converge on the idea that leadership produces favorable employee consequences by shaping employees' perceptions of their relationship with the organization. In a public institution such as the Iraqi Ministry of Sport, justice may be particularly central because employees operate within formal procedures, hierarchical structures, and administrative regulations. Consequently, employees may judge leadership effectiveness largely according to whether authority is exercised fairly.

The high explanatory power of the model for organizational commitment also deserves attention. Leadership style and organizational justice together explained 68.5% of the variance in commitment, suggesting that the model captured a substantial proportion of the factors associated with employees' organizational attachment. This result is consistent with the broad literature showing that leadership, fairness, trust, satisfaction, involvement, and workplace climate are closely connected with organizational commitment (Lo et al., 2024; Morais et al., 2024). Lo et al., for example, demonstrated that organizational commitment is closely related to job involvement and service quality (Lo et al., 2024). Thus, enhancing commitment in the Ministry may have implications beyond retention and may contribute to better service provision, stronger employee involvement, and improved organizational functioning.

The relatively high affective commitment observed in the descriptive findings is particularly encouraging. Affective commitment had a higher mean than continuance and normative commitment, suggesting that employees were more likely to remain associated with the Ministry because of emotional attachment than because of the costs of leaving. This is generally a more desirable pattern because affective attachment is closely associated with identification, willingness to contribute, and sustained involvement. The findings are compatible with studies emphasizing the positive role of commitment in employee performance and broader organizational effectiveness (Gazi et al., 2025; Salajegheh & Bostan Pira, 2025). At the same time, the comparatively moderate level of continuance commitment suggests that employee retention is not predominantly based

on necessity, which reinforces the importance of maintaining a fair and supportive organizational environment.

More broadly, the results illustrate the value of examining organizational phenomena through integrated rather than isolated relationships. Contemporary organizational systems involve multiple interdependent processes, and employee attitudes are rarely determined by one factor alone. Methodological work emphasizing latent structures, heterogeneous relationships, and differentiated effects provides support for analyzing such complexity rather than assuming uniform direct relationships (Yang et al., 2024). Likewise, analytical perspectives emphasizing collaborative development and multidimensional evaluation reinforce the importance of considering interconnected components within complex systems (Cai & Zhang, 2025). The present study demonstrates this principle empirically by showing that the relationship between leadership and commitment cannot be understood adequately without considering organizational justice.

5 Conclusion

The results have implications for broader governance and institutional effectiveness. Effective organizations require not only technically competent leadership but also structures that employees perceive as legitimate and responsible. Research on governance and social responsibility has demonstrated that organizational effectiveness is influenced by the credibility of governance processes and the quality of responsibility practices (Yongsheng & Yingquan, 2025). Within a governmental ministry, fairness in procedures, distribution, and interpersonal treatment can similarly be interpreted as a form of internal governance quality. The results therefore suggest that leadership development programs should not focus exclusively on motivational or interpersonal techniques but should also emphasize equitable decision-making, transparent procedures, consistency, accountability, and respectful communication.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish temporal or causal relationships among leadership style, organizational justice, and organizational commitment. Although the structural model specifies theoretically directed relationships, the data were collected at one point in time and therefore cannot demonstrate conclusively that changes in leadership precede changes in justice perceptions or commitment. Second, all principal variables were measured

through self-report questionnaires completed by the same respondents, which may increase the possibility of common-method bias and socially desirable responding. Third, the study was conducted within a single governmental organization, the Iraqi Ministry of Sport, and its organizational culture, administrative structure, and employment conditions may differ from those of other ministries, private organizations, or sport institutions. Consequently, generalization beyond the studied setting should be undertaken cautiously. Finally, although the model explained a substantial proportion of organizational commitment, other potentially important determinants such as job satisfaction, organizational trust, perceived organizational support, organizational climate, compensation, psychological empowerment, and career opportunities were not included.

Future studies should employ longitudinal research designs to examine whether changes in leadership practices produce subsequent changes in organizational justice and organizational commitment over time. Experimental or intervention-based studies could also evaluate whether leadership-development programs focusing on fair decision-making and employee participation improve employees' justice perceptions and commitment. Replication across other Iraqi ministries, provincial sport organizations, universities, healthcare organizations, and private-sector institutions would help determine whether the mediation mechanism observed in the present study is context-specific or broadly generalizable. Researchers may also expand the model by simultaneously examining additional mediating mechanisms such as trust in leadership, job satisfaction, perceived organizational support, employee engagement, and psychological empowerment. Moderating variables such as gender, organizational tenure, occupational position, generation, and employment status could further clarify whether leadership and justice operate differently across groups. Finally, future studies could combine quantitative surveys with interviews or focus groups to identify the organizational experiences through which employees construct perceptions of fairness and commitment.

Managers and policymakers within the Iraqi Ministry of Sport should prioritize organizational justice as an essential component of leadership effectiveness rather than treating fairness as a separate administrative issue. Leadership-development initiatives should train managers to apply organizational procedures consistently, communicate the reasons behind decisions, provide employees with opportunities to express their views, and ensure that rewards,

responsibilities, promotions, and development opportunities are allocated according to transparent criteria. Particular attention should be directed toward procedural justice because it demonstrated the weakest descriptive performance among the justice dimensions. Managers should also strengthen transformational leadership behaviors by communicating a clear organizational vision, recognizing individual contributions, encouraging employee participation, and providing constructive support, while minimizing passive or avoidant leadership behaviors. Establishing clear grievance mechanisms, transparent performance-evaluation processes, participatory decision-making procedures, and regular communication between managers and employees may further reinforce perceptions of fairness. Because the findings indicate that leadership contributes to commitment primarily through organizational justice, improvements in commitment are most likely to occur when leadership initiatives are accompanied by visible and credible improvements in organizational fairness.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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