

Leadership Styles And Organizational Justice In The Public Health Sector Of Hawassa City (Ethiopia)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of leadership styles on organizational justice perceptions among 516 employees across public hospitals in Hawassa City, Ethiopia. Using an explanatory research design with multi-stage random sampling, data were collected through validated questionnaires adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and Organizational Justice Scale. While the study achieved excellent instrument reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.97$). Multiple linear regression results revealed significant relationships between all three leadership styles and organizational justice, with transformational leadership emerging as a strong positive predictor (B = .302, p < .001), it is characterized by its focus on cultivating a shared vision, inspiring followers, and demonstrating individualized consideration, demonstrates notable efficacy in cultivating perceptions of workplace fairness. Similarly, transactional leadership demonstrated an even stronger association (B = .351, p < .001), it contributes favorably to employees' perceptions of justice. Conversely, laissez-faire leadership exhibited significant negative prediction (B = -.266, p < .001), laissez-faire leadership's passive and avoidant traits weaken employees' sense of organizational justice. The results align with social exchange theory, demonstrating how active leadership behaviors foster reciprocal fairness perceptions, while passive styles erode them. For healthcare administrators, these findings suggest that: 1) structured transactional approaches may provide immediate justice benefits in high-pressure clinical settings, 2) transformational leadership offers complementary long-term cultural benefits, and 3) passive leadership requires urgent remediation.

Keywords: Leadership styles, Leadership in Healthcare, Leadership Influence, Organizational Justice, Hospital Management

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizational justice, defined as fairness in processes, outcomes, and interpersonal treatment within an organization, significantly impacts employee attitudes, behaviors, and overall organizational effectiveness (Karam, 2018). In public hospitals, where employees face high-stress environments and demanding workloads, ensuring organizational justice is particularly crucial for maintaining morale, reducing burnout, and fostering a positive work environment. Leadership styles play a pivotal role in shaping employees' perceptions of organizational justice. Different leadership approaches can either enhance or undermine the sense of fairness and equity within the workplace (Zhang, 2022).

Effective leadership is recognized as a cornerstone for successful organizational outcomes, shaping workplace attitudes, conducts, and organizational outcomes (Reyaz, 2024). The ability of leaders to motivate, guide, and supervise their teams significantly influences the work atmosphere, employee morale, productivity, and the achievement of strategic goals. Conversely, ineffective leadership can lead to decreased job satisfaction, increased turnover, and reduced organizational commitment (Alodhiani, 2024).

The public health sector in Ethiopia, particularly in cities like Hawassa, faces numerous challenges, including resource constraints, high patient volumes, and increasing demands for quality healthcare services. These challenges can exacerbate issues related to organizational justice, making it essential to understand the influence of leadership styles on perceptions of organizational fairness. Prior research indicates that leadership behaviors are strong predictors of organizational justice perceptions (Martunus et al., 2020; Qi et al., 2023)

While the significance of leadership and organizational justice is well established, there is a lack of empirical evidence on how different leadership styles affect perceptions of justice in Ethiopia's public healthcare sector. Understanding this relationship is vital for developing targeted interventions and leadership development programs that promote fairness, enhance employee well-being, and improve organizational performance in these critical healthcare settings. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to investigate the influence of leadership styles on organizational justice among employees in public hospitals in Hawassa City, Ethiopia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Justice

Employees assess workplace fairness through: (1) outcome equity (distributive), (2) process validity (procedural), (3) explanation quality (informational), and (4) respect in interactions (interpersonal) - collectively shaping engagement and retention. Informational justice relates to the adequacy and honesty of the information provided to employees, while interpersonal justice concerns the respect and dignity with which employees are treated (Karam, 2018).

Employees' perceptions of fairness within an organization play a crucial role in shaping key workplace outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, trust in leadership, and overall job performance. When individuals believe they are being treated equitably, they tend to demonstrate more favorable attitudes and behaviors, thereby fostering a collaborative and efficient work atmosphere. In contrast, feelings of unfair treatment can give rise to adverse effects, including diminished motivation, elevated stress levels, and engagement in counterproductive activities (Yogasari, 2019).

Transformational Leadership and Organizational Justice

Transformational leadership involves the ability to inspire and energize followers to attain exceptional results while enhancing their leadership potential. This style of leadership is marked by behaviors such as serving as a role model (idealized influence), articulating a compelling vision (inspirational motivation), encouraging innovation and critical thinking (intellectual stimulation), and providing personalized support (individualized consideration). By cultivating trust and loyalty, transformational leaders can positively shape how employees perceive fairness and justice within the organization (Bose, 2015).

Several studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational justice. Transformational leaders promote fairness by ensuring that decisions are made transparently and that employees are treated with respect and dignity (Ibrahim et al., 2023). By fostering a culture of trust and open communication, transformational leaders enhance employees' perceptions of procedural, distributive, informational, and interpersonal justice (Notarnicola et al., 2024).

Transactional Leadership and Organizational Justice

Transactional leadership focuses on the exchange between leaders and followers, where followers' needs are met if their performance expectations are achieved. Transactional leaders use contingent rewards and management-by-exception to motivate employees. While transactional leadership can provide clarity and structure, its impact on organizational justice is more complex than that of transformational leadership (Subramanyam, 2025).

Transactional leaders can foster perceptions of distributive and procedural justice by ensuring that rewards are allocated fairly based on performance and that decision-making processes are transparent. However, if transactional leaders overly emphasize control and monitoring, it may lead to perceptions of reduced interpersonal and informational justice. Therefore, the relationship between organizational justice and transactional leadership depends on how effectively transactional leaders implement their strategies (Jeong, 2025).

Laissez-faire Leadership and Organizational Justice

Laissez-faire is defined by minimal leader involvement in decision-making processes, often resulting in a hands-off approach to guiding and supporting subordinates and a general detachment from followers. Laissez-faire tends to evade decision-making responsibilities, often refraining from providing direction or taking active leadership roles, providing guidance, or offering support to their subordinates. This leadership style is generally considered ineffective and is often associated with negative outcomes (Hinkin, 2007).

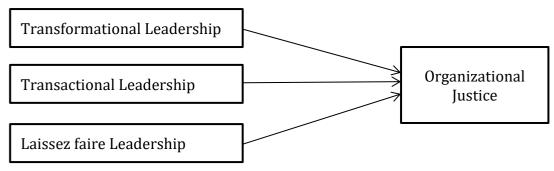
The absence of leadership and guidance associated with laissez-faire leadership can negatively impact perceptions of organizational justice. Employees may perceive a lack of fairness in decision-making processes, resource allocation, and interpersonal treatment when leaders are uninvolved and unresponsive. This can lead to feelings of neglect, reduced trust, and increased perceptions of injustice across all dimensions of organizational justice (Jin, 2023).

Conceptual Framework

Previous literatures posits that transformational and transactional leadership styles are positively related to organizational justice, while laissez-faire leadership is negatively related to organizational justice. The framework considers that

transformational leadership enhances perceptions of fairness through inspiration, motivation, and ethical conduct, while transactional leadership does so through clear expectations and fair rewards. Conversely, laissez-faire leadership undermines organizational justice due to a lack of involvement and guidance.

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework of the Study



Source: Adapted from (Kien & Konosu, 2023; Martunus et al., 2020)

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory type of research design. This can help to evaluate the influence of different leadership styles on organizational justice in public hospitals in Hawassa City. Explanatory research is appropriate for establishing cause-and-effect relationships between variables, which aligns with the objective of determining how leadership styles impact organizational justice.

Research Approach

This study employed a quantitative approach to systematically examine the research questions through empirical data analysis. The quantitative approach enabled precise measurement of variables through numerical data collection, followed by rigorous statistical analysis to examine relationships between key constructs. By utilizing standardized instruments and statistical techniques, this methodology provided objective, replicable evidence to assess key relationships and validate theoretical assumptions. The numerical nature of the data facilitated comparative analysis across different leadership styles and their measurable impacts on turnover intention, allowing for generalizable conclusions about these organizational phenomena. This approach allowed for the objective measurement of leadership styles and organizational justice, as well as the examination of the relationships between these variables using statistical techniques.

Sample Size

The total number of employees in the selected public hospitals was estimated to be 1906. The study employed Yamane's (1967) formula for calculating the optimal sample size, ensuring statistically reliable results while considering practical research constraints.

$$n = N / (1 + N (e)^2)$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error (0.04)

$$n = 1906 / (1 + 1906(0.04)^2) \approx 548$$

Out of the 548 questionnaires distributed to selected respondents in the study area, 516 were properly completed and utilized for analysis.

Sampling Technique

A multi-stage type of sampling method was employed to select participants for the study. The sampling process involved including all five public hospitals in Hawassa City as the sampling frame, and their employees constituted the target population for the study. Using stratified sampling within each selected hospital, employees were stratified into different categories (e.g., doctors, nurses, administrative staff) to ensure representation from all employee groups. Finally, systematic random sampling was then used to select individual participants from each stratum within each hospital until the required

sample size of 516 was achieved.

Data Collection Instruments

Primary data were collected through a structured five-point Likert scale questionnaire with responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." administered to the study participants. Transformational leadership was measured using the Transformational Leadership Inventory, while transactional leadership was assessed via the Transactional Leadership Scale, which captures the two subcomponents: contingent reward and management-by-exception. Laissez-faire leadership was evaluated using the Laissez-faire Leadership Scale, which gauges the degree to which leaders refrain from decision-making and offering direction. Organizational justice was measured using the Organizational Justice Scale, encompassing four dimensions such as distributive, procedural, informational, and interpersonal justice. To ensure measurement reliability, internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.907, indicating excellent reliability (George & Mallery, 2003).

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26), following a structured and methodical approach to answer the research objective. The analysis unfolded in three distinct phases. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the central tendencies and dispersion of the study variables, with mean scores and standard deviations offering an initial overview of participants' perceptions of leadership styles and organizational justice. Second, Pearson's bivariate correlation analysis was employed to explore the linear associations among the key constructs, revealing the strength and direction of relationships between transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles and the dimensions of organizational justice. In the final phase, multiple linear regression analysis was utilized to assess the extent to which the leadership styles predicted perceptions of organizational justice. This multivariate method enabled the simultaneous consideration of all predictor variables while accounting for their intercorrelations, thereby offering a clearer understanding of each leadership style's unique contribution to organizational justice.

4. RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for all study variables, presenting both mean scores and standard deviations. The mean values reveal the central tendency of participants' responses for each measured construct, while the standard deviations indicate the degree of variation in these responses.

Variable Mean Std. Deviation

Transformational Leadership 2.9215 .81466

Transactional Leadership 2.8535 .75232

Laissez-faire Leadership 3.2660 .82231

Organizational Justice 2.8036 .67844

Table 1: Descriptive Summary of Variables

Source: Survey Data, 2025

The results of Table 1 present the descriptive statistics for the study variables, revealing that laissez-faire leadership had the highest mean score ($\bar{x}=3.27$, SD = 0.82), indicating a relatively prevalent passive leadership style, while transformational ($\bar{x}=2.92$, SD = 0.81) and transactional ($\bar{x}=2.85$, SD = 0.75) leadership showed moderate adoption. Organizational justice received the lowest mean score ($\bar{x}=2.80$, SD = 0.68), suggesting that employees perceived fairness as only moderately present. The standard deviations (ranging from 0.68 to 0.82) reflect moderate variability in responses, confirming that perceptions differed across participants.

Correlation Analysis

Table 2 presents the correlation analysis results, showing the relationships between the different leadership styles and organizational justice.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Transformational	Transactional	Laissez-fair	Organizational
	Leadership	Leadership	Leadership	Justice

Leadership	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	n	516		
Transactional Leadership	Pearson Correlation	.492**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	n	516	516	
Laissez-fair Leadership	Pearson Correlation	266**	150**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	
	n	516	516	516
Organizational Justice	Pearson Correlation	.640**	.616**	478**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	n	516	516	516

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis demonstrates significant relationships between leadership styles and organizational justice, with transformational leadership showing the strongest positive association (r = .640, p < .01), indicating that leaders who inspire, motivate, and foster innovation tend to cultivate higher perceptions of fairness among employees. Similarly, transactional leadership also exhibits a strong positive correlation with organizational justice (r = .616, p < .01), suggesting that structured leadership approaches emphasizing clear expectations and rewards contribute to a greater sense of workplace equity. In contrast, laissez-faire leadership displays a moderate negative correlation with organizational justice (r = -.478, p < .01), implying that passive or absent leadership behaviors diminish employees' perceptions of fairness. These robust and statistically significant relationships underscore that active, engaged leadership styles are key drivers of organizational justice, while disengaged leadership erodes it.

Regression Analysis

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis, showing the extent to which each leadership style predicts organizational justice.

Unstandardized Standardized Coefficients Coefficients Sig. Beta Model SE 1.788 124 14.386 000 (Constant) .302 .027 000 Transformational Leadership 363 11.400 Transactional Leadership 351 .028 389 12.526 000 Laissez-fair Leadership .266 .023 .322 -11.498000 Dependent Variable: Organizational Justice

Table 3: Regression Analysis

The regression analysis indicates that transformational leadership significantly predicts organizational justice (B = .302, p < .001). This suggests that for every one-unit increase in transformational leadership, organizational justice increases by 0.302 units, implying that employees perceive greater fairness as leaders exhibit more transformational behaviors. This finding aligns with prior research demonstrating a positive correlation between transformational leadership and all dimensions of organizational justice, distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (Hendrian & Patiro, 2020). Transformational leaders who prioritize fairness tend to enhance employee work satisfaction (Ibrahim et al., 2023). By fostering ethical standards and moral motivation, they cultivate a workplace where employees feel valued and respected, thereby strengthening perceptions of justice. Moreover, transformational leadership inherently promotes fair and equitable practices (Khan et al., 2023). Leaders

who embody transformational qualities serve as ethical role models, reinforcing a culture where fairness is prioritized. Consequently, when organizations adopt transformational leadership, procedural and interpersonal fairness improves (Xiaoqing & Sukumaran, 2025), creating a more positive work environment where employees trust that they are treated justly.

Transactional leadership significantly predicts organizational justice (B = .351, p < .001), with a one-unit increase in transactional leadership corresponding to a 0.351-unit increase in fairness perceptions, suggesting its structured approach has a slightly stronger immediate impact than transformational leadership due to its emphasis on clarity and consistency. This effect depends critically on transparent reward systems (Al, 2023), as employees' justice perceptions strengthen when rewards are objectively tied to performance (Yasir et al., 2023) but erode if favoritism is perceived, leading to demotivation and resentment (Iqbal et al., 2023). To maximize benefits, transactional leaders must enforce equitable policies with objective criteria, transparent communication, and consistent application (Hubais et al., 2023), as even minor biases can undermine the leadership-justice relationship.

In contrast, laissez-faire leadership demonstrates a significant negative relationship with organizational justice (B = -.266, p < .001), indicating that each one-unit increase in passive leadership corresponds to a 0.266-unit decrease in perceived fairness. This detrimental effect stems from inconsistent treatment, eroded accountability, and weakened trust in management when leaders disengage. Empirical evidence consistently confirms this inverse correlation (Tziner & Shkoler, 2018), with employees under laissez-faire leaders reporting diminished perceptions across all justice dimensions, distributive, procedural, and interactional (Breevaart & Zacher, 2019). Such perceived injustice triggers adverse outcomes, including lower job satisfaction, weakened organizational commitment, and heightened turnover intentions (Jaboob et al., 2022). Crucially, fostering organizational justice requires active leadership engagement; the inherent passivity of laissez-faire styles perpetuates inequity by failing to address systemic biases or model ethical standards, ultimately cultivating cultures where unfairness proliferates unchecked.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Leadership styles play a critical role in shaping how employees perceive fairness and justice within public hospitals. Transformational leadership, which focuses on inspiring a shared vision, motivating staff through meaningful engagement, and addressing individual needs, has been shown to significantly enhance employees' sense of organizational justice. By fostering trust, open communication, and a sense of collective purpose, transformational leaders create an environment where employees feel valued and treated equitably. Similarly, transactional leadership, with its clear role expectations, structured feedback, and performance-based rewards, reinforces perceptions of fairness by ensuring transparency and consistency in decision-making. In contrast, laissez-faire leadership, marked by a lack of direction, minimal involvement, and avoidance of responsibility, consistently weakens employees' trust in organizational justice, leading to frustration and disengagement. These findings highlight that leadership behaviors directly influence workplace fairness, making it essential for healthcare institutions to prioritize active and engaged leadership styles.

The implications of these findings are particularly significant for public hospitals, where high-stress environments and resource constraints can exacerbate perceptions of injustice. Transformational and transactional leadership styles not only promote fairness but also enhance employee morale, commitment, and overall performance. On the other hand, passive leadership approaches like laissez-faire can erode trust, increase turnover, and negatively impact patient care quality. Therefore, healthcare organizations must invest in leadership development programs that cultivate transformational and transactional competencies while discouraging passive management tendencies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Hospital administrators and policymakers should prioritize the development and promotion of transformational and transactional leadership styles among healthcare leaders. Leadership development programs should focus on enhancing leaders' abilities to inspire and motivate their teams (transformational leadership) to set clear expectations and provide fair rewards (transactional leadership).

Efforts should be made to minimize the prevalence of laissez-faire leadership within public hospitals. This can be achieved through leadership training, performance evaluations, and mentorship programs that emphasize the importance of active involvement, guidance, and support.

Leaders should foster open communication and transparency in decision-making processes to enhance employees' perceptions of procedural and informational justice. Regular feedback sessions, transparent policies, and clear communication channels can help build trust and ensure that employees feel informed and respected.

Hospital administrators should ensure that resources are allocated fairly and equitably across different departments and

employee groups to promote distributive justice. Transparent criteria for promotions, salary increases, and other rewards should be established and communicated to all employees..

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