

Fairness Perceptions and Job Satisfaction as Mediators of the Relationship between Leadership Style and Organizational Commitment

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Abstract

This study was conducted to explore the relationship between different leadership styles and organizational commitment. Furthermore, it attempts to clarify the role of justice perceptions and job satisfaction as mediators of the relationship between (active and passive/avoiding) leadership styles and organizational commitment. The structural equations modeling was used to analyze data collected from a sample of participants recruited from different organizations. The results have indicated that perceived supervisors active leadership styles are positively linked, and have both, direct and indirect effects on employees' organizational commitment. Perceived passive/avoiding leadership styles do not have any effect on organizational justice, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Employees' job satisfaction depends directly on the level of organizational justice being perceived by the employees. Job satisfaction also significantly contributes to organizational commitment. Implications of the results concerning job and organizational attitudes are discussed, and suggestions for managing human resources are given.

Keywords: active leadership style, passive/avoiding leadership style, organizational justice, job satisfaction, organizational commitment

Introduction

Productivity and performance of an organization depends upon the organizational commitment of its employees (Bushra, Usman, & Naveed, 2011). Because leadership has been proposed as one of the most decisive factors contributing to the attitudes of employees toward their organization (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003), it is probably among the most prominent predictors of organizational commitment. Findings of Ibrahim, Nurzahit, and Türker (2010) suggest that leadership has a substantial incremental effect on organizational commitment.

Prior research reported also the significant relationship between organizational justice and job satisfaction mutually and with factors mentioned above, whereas few of them looked into the mediator role of organizational justice and job satisfaction for the association between those factors (e.g., Ambrose, Hess, & Ganesan, 2007; Bakhshi, Kumar, & Rani, 2009; Crow, Lee, & Joo, 2012).

Leadership Style

Leadership is defined as a process of interaction between leaders and followers in which leader attempts to influence followers in order to achieve a common goal (Yukl, 2008). One of the "new-leadership" theories has been called the "full-range leadership theory" (FRLT) proposed by Bass and Avolio (1994). The constructs comprising the FRLT denote three typologies of leadership behavior: transformational, transactional and nontransactional laissez-faire leadership, which are represented by nine distinct factors (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003).

Transformational Leadership (TF). Transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Transformational leadership is theorized to comprise the following factors: (1) *idealized influence*, which includes behaviors like sacrificing for the sake of the group, demonstrating high ethical standards and setting a personal example (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003); (2) *inspirational motivation*, which entails the creation and presentation of an attractive vision of the future, use of symbols and emotional arguments, and the demonstration of optimism and enthusiasm (Kark et al., 2003); (3) *intellectual stimulation* is the leader's ability to challenge followers to solve problems – by encouraging followers to look into problems in new ways and by requiring new solutions, the leader pushes them to perform beyond what they previously considered possible; and (4) *individual consideration*, in which the leader treats each follower differently but equitably, providing all with individual attention. As a result, followers feel unique, encouraged, and motivated (Nahavandi, 2003).

Transactional Leadership (TA). Transactional leadership occurs when the leader rewards or disciplines the follower, depending on the adequacy of the follower's performance (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Antonakis et al. (2003) theorized transactional leadership to comprise the following factors: (1) *contingent reward leadership* refers to leader behaviors focused on clarifying role and task requirements and providing followers with material or psychological rewards contingent on the fulfillment of contractual obligations; (2) *management by exceptions*: (a) *active* (AMBE - refers to the active vigilance of a leader whose goal is to ensure that standards are met) and (b) *passive* (PMBE - leaders only intervene after noncompliance has occurred or when mistakes have already happened).

Laissez-faire Leadership (LF). In contrast to transactional and transformational, laissez-faire is a passive kind of leadership style (Long & Thean, 2011). Laissez-faire leadership style assumes the absence of a transaction, in which the leader abdicates responsibility, does not use their authority and avoids making decisions. It is considered active only to the extent that the leader "elects" to avoid taking some action (Antonakis et al. 2003). Researchers consistently reported laissez-faire leadership as one of the least effective and satisfying styles of leadership (Bass, 1990). This is probably the main reason that many researchers decide to rule out laissez-faire leadership from their exploration.

During the years of research and use of this theory in practice, it has been proved that *contingent reward leadership* and *active management by exceptions* should be viewed as a *transactional style* of leadership, and *passive management by exceptions* and *laissez-faire* as a *passive/avoiding leadership style* (Yukl, 2008).

Organizational Justice

Empirical research has shown that perceptions of justice are strongly related to the individual's attitudes, such as job satisfaction and commitment (Al-Zu'bi, 2010; Ambrose et al., 2007). Justice definitions have been broadly applied in many theoretical issues and researches. Organizational justice refers to people's perceptions of fairness in organizations along with their associated behavioral, cognitive and emotional reactions (Greenberg, 2011). Organizational justice is considered to involve three different elements: distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice (McDowall & Fletcher, 2004). *Distributive justice* relates to the preoccupations expressed by employees considering the distribution of outcomes and resources (Cropanzano & Folger, 1989). *Procedural justice* refers to the fairness of procedures used to define the outcome of decisions. Those procedures should be coherent, unprejudiced and morally acceptable (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997). *Interactional justice* concerns the fairness of interpersonal communication relating to the organizational procedures (McDowall & Fletcher, 2004). It is concerned with the way of communicating the information and whether

the individuals affected by a decision were treated with dignity and respect (Bies & Moag, 1986).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been one of the most studied variables over the last decades of organizational research. Interest in job satisfaction derives from its relationships to other organizational outcomes including organizational commitment, absenteeism, turnover and performance. Job satisfaction has been defined and measured both as a global construct and as a concept with multiple dimensions or facets (Lund, 2003). Job satisfaction implies a positive affect resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Locke, 1976). As is the case with all attitudes, job satisfaction is composed of cognitive, evaluative and affective components. The *evaluative component* - an individual's global response to the employing organization represents dislike vs. like for the organization. The *cognitive component* - an individual's perceptions, beliefs, opinions and expectations concerning the organization are the focus of his cognitions. Cognitions in which the individual perceives that his expectations have been fulfilled, generally lead to positive assessments. The *affective component* - refers to the feeling evoked by the organization. In general, positive affect results from information, feedback, and situations that affirm or reinforce the individual's self worth and self-concept, while negative affect is evoked by invalidating situations (Bakhshi et al., 2009).

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment can be thought of as the extent to which employees are dedicated to their organization and are willing to work to its benefit, and the prospect that they will maintain membership (Jex, 2002). Meyer and Allen (1991) indicated three correlated but distinguished dimensions of organizational commitment: affective, continuance and normative commitment. *Affective commitment* represents an employee's emotional attachment, identification and involvement in the organization. *Continuance commitment* is commitment based on costs that an employee associates with leaving the organization, while *normative commitment* represents employee's feeling of the obligation to stay within the organization. Organizational commitment not only increases the success in a certain role, but also encourages the individual to achieve many voluntary actions necessary for organizational life and to reduce the absenteeism rate, turnover ratio and enhances the organization productivity (Jernigan, Beggs, & Kohut, 2002).

Perceived Organizational Justice and Job Satisfaction as the Mediators between Leadership Style and Organizational Commitment

Various studies conducted on leadership style claimed that leadership style is considered as antecedent of organizational commitment (Sabir, Sohail, & Asif Khan, 2011) and that there is a strong, positive relationship between leadership and organizational commitment (Ekaterini, 2010; Sabir et al., 2011).

Overall justice has been found to be a mediator of leadership to job satisfaction (Mayer, Bardes, & Piccolo, 2008) and organizational commitment (Bakhshi et al., 2009; Lee, 2000). Other studies (e.g., Bakhshi et al., 2009; Lok & Crawford, 2001) revealed a positive association between organizational justice and job satisfaction, and suggested that employees' job satisfaction depends upon the organizational justice of managers (Al-Zu'bi, 2010), which indicates that organizational justice is an antecedent of job satisfaction.

Many researchers proposed that job satisfaction has a special significance for a consideration of the effects of various antecedent constructs on organizational commitment. Mathieu and Zajac (1990) suggested that the numerous effects of various antecedents on organizational commitment are mediated through job satisfaction. Lambert, Hogan, and Griffin (2007) found that job satisfaction had a significant impact on organizational commitment. Williams and Hazer (1986) also found strong support, using structural equation modeling, that job satisfaction was an antecedent of organizational commitment. In a more recent study, Crow et al. (2012) confirmed the mediator role of job satisfaction for the relationship between organizational justice and organizational commitment.

The current study aims to explore the relationship between perceived (active and passive/avoiding) leadership styles and organizational commitment, using structural equation modeling. In addition, this study attempts to expand the literature by clarifying the role of fairness perceptions and job satisfaction as mediators of the relationship between two aforementioned organizational factors.

- H1:** Active leadership styles will be positively linked, and have both, direct and indirect effects on organizational commitment.
- H2:** Passive/avoiding leadership styles will be negatively linked, and have both, direct and indirect effects on organizational commitment.
- H3:** Active leadership styles will be positively linked to fairness perceptions.
- H4:** Passive/avoiding leadership styles will be negatively linked to fairness perceptions.
- H5:** Fairness perceptions will be positively linked to job satisfaction and, in turn, to higher levels of organizational commitment.
- H6:** Job satisfaction will be positively linked to organizational commitment.

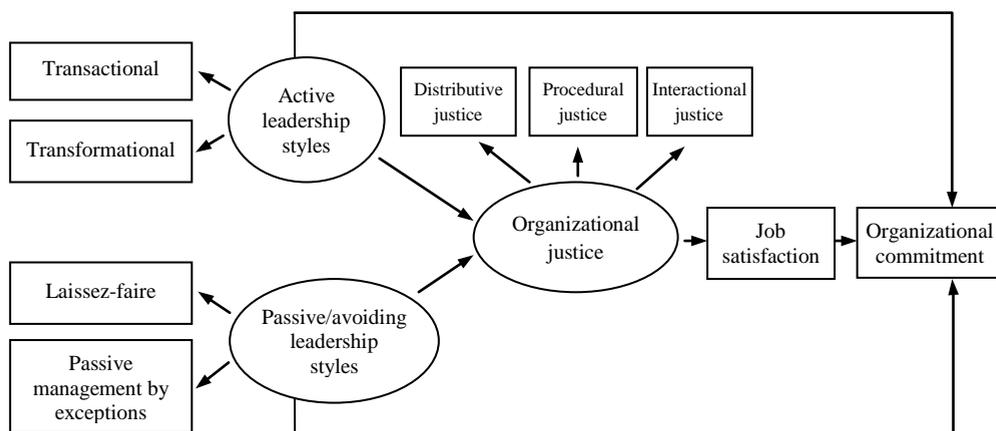
H7: Fairness perceptions and job satisfaction will mediate the relationships between leadership styles and organizational commitment.

Proposed Model

Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized model linking leadership styles and organizational commitment through fairness perceptions and job satisfaction.

The proposed model builds on and extends past research and theory by incorporating the concepts of organizational justice and job satisfaction as leadership mediators suggested by Lee (2000). The model includes a global assessment of fairness perception as recommended by Mayer, Bardes, and Piccolo (2008), job satisfaction as mediator between organizational justice and organizational commitment suggested by Crow and collaborators (2012) and assesses organizational commitment as a set of subordinates' outcomes as was the case in Yang's (2012) work.

Figure 1. *Proposed mediational model*



Method

Participants

Participants (537) were recruited from 17 Croatian organizations that represent a variety of different industries (e.g., manufacturing, public sector, service), departments (e.g., production, accounting, personnel), and organizational levels [e.g., ranging from employees on nonmanagerial position (48%), first-line supervisors (43%) to middle managers (9%)]. The gender composition of the

sample was 34% male and 66% female. There were 52% employees up to 40 years old. Most of the employees (73%) had more than five years of work experience.

Instruments

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ–Form 5X short; Avolio and Bass, 2010) was used to assess immediate supervisor's leadership style. The MLQ was originally constructed for the assessment of leadership within the full-range leadership model. In this study a total of 36 items was used, which measure transformational leadership (i.e., idealized influence - attribution and behavior, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration), transactional leadership (contingent reward and management by exception-active), and passive-avoiding leadership styles or absence of leadership (laissez-faire and management by exception-passive). Items were presented in Likert-type format with a scale ranging from (1=*never*) to (5=*almost always*). Composite scores for the two higher-order leadership factors (active and passive leadership) were computed by summing across items, with higher scores indicating higher perceived style of leadership. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the measures of leadership style were .95 for transformational, .87 for transactional, .78 for laissez-faire, .69 for management by exception, .96 for active and .84 for passive leadership style.

Organizational Justice Perception Questionnaire (Ćulumović, 2005, adjusted from Beugré & Baron, 2001; Colquitt, 2001; Cropanzano, Prehar, & Chen, 2002; Niehoff & Moorman, 1993) was used to assess fairness perceptions. Questionnaire contains 39 items divided into three subscales in order to measure three types of organizational justice: procedural (15), interactional (13) and distributive (11). Items were presented in Likert-type format with a scale ranging from (1=*strongly disagree*) to (5=*completely agree*). Composite scores were computed by summing across items for each subscale, with higher scores indicating higher perceived organizational justice for each of three types. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the three types of organizational justice were .93 for procedural justice, .94 for interactional justice and .93 for distributive justice. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall justice was .97.

Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (Gregson, 1987), a 30-item questionnaire, adjusted from Smith's, Kendall's, and Hulin's (1969) *Job Descriptive Index (JDI)*, was used to assess job satisfaction. Same as original JDI, it identifies five dimensions of job satisfaction: work, pay, promotion, supervision, and coworkers (six items for each of them). Items were presented in Likert-type format with a scale ranging from (1=*strongly disagree*) to (5=*completely agree*). Composite scores were computed by summing across items, with higher scores indicating higher overall job satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall job satisfaction was .92.

Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Maslić-Seršić, 2000, adjusted from Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993) was used to assess organizational commitment. The questionnaire contains 18 items equally divided into three subscales in order to measure three types of organizational commitment: affective, normative and continuance. Items were presented in Likert-type format with a scale ranging from (1=*strongly disagree*) to (5=*completely agree*). Composite scores were computed by summing across items, with higher scores indicating higher overall organizational commitment. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall organizational commitment was .85.

Procedure

The research was conducted in larger or smaller groups in the employees' organization. It lasted approximately 25 minutes. Participation in the study was anonymous and voluntary.

Results

Descriptive statistics

First, all variables were examined for the accuracy of data entry, missing values, fit between their distributions and assumptions of multivariate analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). All assumptions are fulfilled, and all variables were deemed normally distributed. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of all measured variables are presented in Table 1.

As expected, the associations between active leadership styles and both mediating variables were positive ($r_s=.71$ for fairness perceptions and $.30$ for job satisfaction, $p_s<.01$), as well as the association between active leadership styles and organizational commitment ($r=.41$, $p<.01$). As predicted, the association between passive/avoiding leadership styles and organizational justice was negative ($r=-.49$, $p<.01$), as well as the association between passive/avoiding leadership styles and organizational commitment ($r=-.26$, $p<.01$). Association between passive/avoiding leadership styles and job satisfaction was statistically insignificant ($r=-.08$, $p>.05$). The correlation between fairness perceptions and job satisfaction was positive ($r=.39$, $p<.01$). Finally, both mediating variables also yielded positive associations with organizational commitment ($r_s=.39$ for fairness perceptions and $.29$ for job satisfaction, $p_s<.01$).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Cronbach alpha coefficients and Correlations of all variables measured

	Correlations											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Active leadership styles	-	.99	.93	-.59	-.60	-.48	.71	.54	.71	.71	.30	.41
2. Transformational		-	.88	-.58	-.59	-.47	.70	.52	.70	.69	.29	.41
3. Transactional			-	-.58	-.59	-.47	.70	.54	.69	.69	.28	.38
4. Passive/avoiding leadership styles				-	.93	.91	-.49	-.35	-.52	-.47	-.08	-.26
5. Laissez-faire					-	.69	-.48	-.35	-.51	-.47	-.12	-.30
6. Passive management by exceptions						-	-.41	-.29	-.44	-.39	-.04	-.19
7. Organizational justice							-	.85	.93	.91	.39	.39
8. Distributive								-	.71	.67	.32	.37
9. Procedural									-	.81	.41	.38
10. Interactional										-	.32	.33
11. Job satisfaction											-	.29
12. Organizational commitment												-
	Descriptive Statistics											
<i>M</i>	91.45	65.29	26.11	18.44	8.88	9.56	117.92	31.29	44.26	42.23	88.21	55.62
<i>SD</i>	23.02	16.94	6.74	6.31	3.59	3.27	32.42	10.41	12.93	12.60	7.64	8.65
<i>α</i>	.96	.95	.87	.84	.78	.69	.97	.93	.93	.94	.92	.85

Note. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

N=537. *rs* over .09 are significant at $p < .01$.

Structural Equations Modeling

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) techniques, which allow researchers to evaluate how closely a theoretical model fits an actual data set, were used to test the hypothesized model (see Figure 2). IBM SPSS Amos Version 20 was used to analyze the relationship among the factor groups for research hypotheses within SEM. Use of those analyses is consistent with previous leadership and organizational commitment research (e.g., Ekaterini, 2010; Ibrahim et al., 2010; Lee, 2000; Sabir et al., 2011).

The variance-covariance matrix was analyzed using the maximum-likelihood estimation and using multiple indices of model fit including the Chi-Square statistic (χ^2), the Standardised root mean square residual (SRMR), the Comparative fit index (CFI), the Goodness-of-fit statistic (GFI), the Adjusted goodness-of-fit statistic (AGFI), Normed-fit index (NFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) and the Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA).

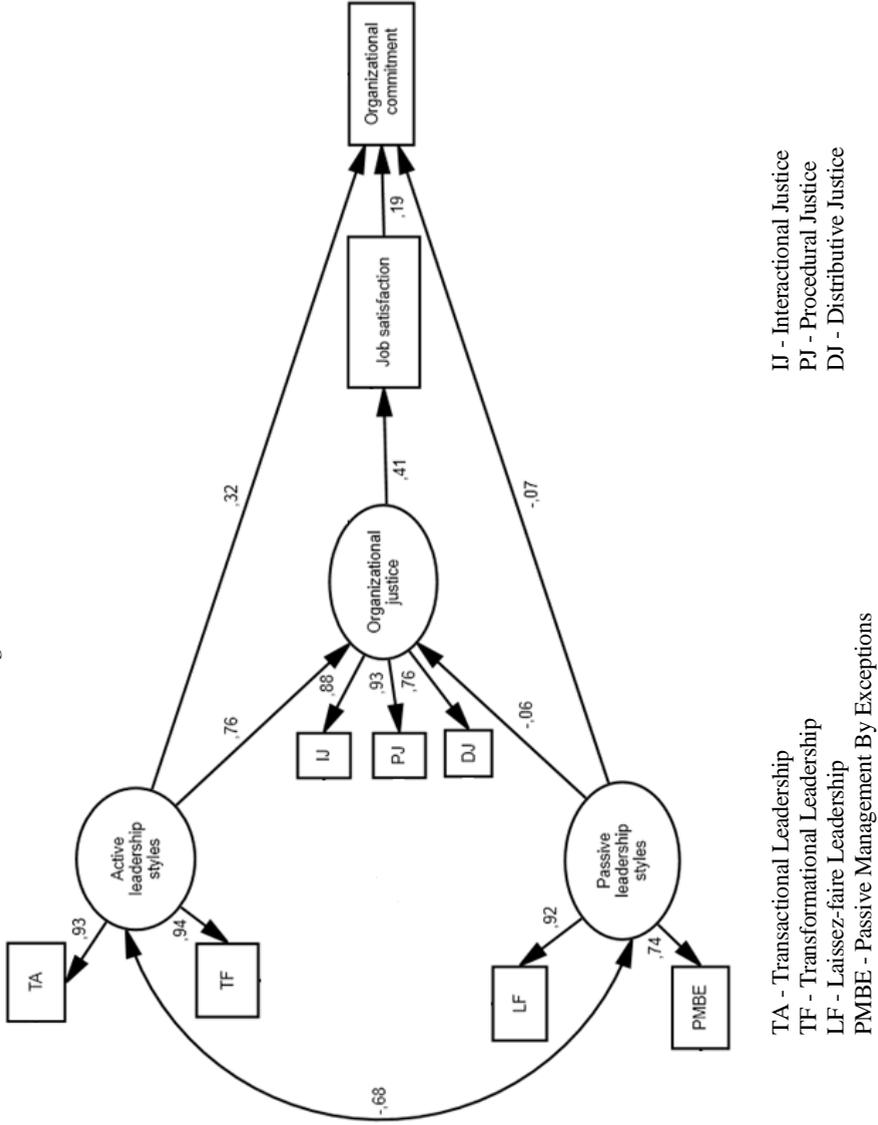
Values lower than .05 for the SRMR indicate well fitting models (Byrne, 1998; Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000). A value of CFI .95 is presently recognised as indicative of good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). A cut-off point of .95 has been recommended for the GFI (Miles & Shevlin, 1998). Values of .90 or greater indicate well fitting models for the AGFI (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008). Hu and Bentler (1999) recommended NFI and TLI values of .95 or higher. More recently, a cut-off value for RMSEA close to .06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) or a stringent upper limit of .07 (Steiger, 2007) is recommended.

Although the chi square is the standard statistic to assess the overall fit of the model to the data, it is practically impossible not to reject the null hypothesis when large samples are used (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). To address this limitation, we employed above mentioned additional fit indices.

The results indicated a very good fit by most indices (χ^2 [df=22; N=537]=68.40, $p<.001$; SRMR=.035; CFI=.985; GFI=.974; AGFI=.946; NFI=.978; TLI=.975; RMSEA=.063).

In line with the proposed hypotheses, the (standardised) parameters of the model supported the positive influence of active leadership styles on fairness perceptions ($\beta=.76$, $p<.001$), which was positively linked to job satisfaction ($\beta=.41$, $p<.001$), and in turn, also with organizational commitment ($\beta=.19$, $p<.001$). These findings fully support **H1** and **H3**. Unlike the correlation matrix, the model suggested the statistically insignificant direct effect of passive/avoiding leadership styles on fairness perceptions ($\beta=-.06$, $p>.05$) and organizational commitment ($\beta=-.07$, $p>.05$), which is not in line with **H2** and **H4**. Finally, organizational justice positively influenced job satisfaction ($\beta=.41$, $p<.001$), which in turn positively influenced organizational commitment ($\beta=.19$, $p<.001$). These last findings give support to **H5** and **H6**.

Figure 2. Fairness Perceptions and Job Satisfaction as Mediators of the Relationship between Leadership Styles and Organizational Commitment



Based on research and theory on leadership, organizational justice and job satisfaction, we also proposed that fairness perceptions and job satisfaction would mediate the relationship between leadership styles and organizational commitment.

In order to assess the significance of a mediation effect, a Monte-Carlo (bootstrapping) approximation was obtained by constructing bias-corrected percentile method (1000 samples; confidence interval of 90). It was found that active leadership styles positively influenced job satisfaction through its relations to fairness perceptions ($\beta=.31, p<.01$); fairness perceptions positively influenced organizational commitment through its relations to job satisfaction ($\beta=.08, p<.01$) and active leadership style also positively influenced organizational commitment via fairness perceptions and job satisfaction ($\beta=.06, p<.01$). Indirect (mediated) effect of passive/avoiding leadership styles on job satisfaction ($\beta=-.03, p>.05$) and, in turn on organizational commitment ($\beta=-.01, p>.05$) was statistically insignificant. Finally, organizational justice positively influenced organizational commitment through job satisfaction ($\beta=.08, p<.01$). These findings partly support **H7**. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed below.

Discussion

A model linking leadership styles with organizational commitment was proposed and tested. Results of this research are consistent with the results of previous research. Active leadership styles are positively linked and have both, direct and indirect effects on organizational commitment. That means that one mechanism by which leaders may be able to build commitment among their subordinates is also through fair treatment, which leads to higher levels of their job satisfaction. This finding is in line with the results of previous research. For example, Ali, Babar, and Bangash (2011) found statistically significant, positive correlations between transactional and transformational leadership styles and employee's organizational commitment. Yang (2012) confirmed job satisfaction to be a mediator between transformational leadership style and organizational commitment. Walumbwa, Wang, Lawler, and Shi (2004) proved that transformational leadership style was positively correlated with employee's job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Hamidifar (2009) cited a study examining the effectiveness of different leadership styles and its impact on job satisfaction, which affirmed that active leadership styles (transactional and transformational) were strongly correlated with job satisfaction, while passive leadership styles were highly and negatively correlated with the above mentioned work attitude. Results of the current study give support to these findings only in the case of active leadership styles. Passive/avoiding leadership styles do not have a negative impact either on

organizational justice, or on the job satisfaction, and ultimately on organizational commitment. It suggests that leader behaviors such as avoiding making decisions, abdicating responsibility and misuse of authority, are not perceived by their subordinates as either fair or unfair and have no effect on their job satisfaction and organizational commitment. These results do not correspond to the findings of other research. For example, Hamidifar (2009) claimed that employees are not satisfied under the laissez-faire leadership and found statistically significant negative effect of laissez-faire leadership on the employee's job satisfaction. Further, Brown (2003) found that laissez-faire leadership and passive management by exceptions had statistically significant negative correlation with affective and normative commitment. Saqer (2009) even found a positive, though weak, correlation between laissez-faire leadership style and continuance commitment.

Job satisfaction depends directly on the level of procedural, distributive and interactional justice being perceived by the employees. Prior studies confirmed relationship between organizational justice perceptions and employees job satisfaction (e.g. Al-Zu'bi, 2010; Bakhshi et al., 2009). Job satisfaction also significantly contributed to organizational commitment, as it was the case with affective and continuance commitment in studies of Crow et al. (2012), Lok and Crawford (2001), and Yang (2012). Chughtai and Zafar (2006) also found different facets of job satisfaction and dimensions of organizational justice significantly correlated with organizational commitment. In order to increase employee's organizational commitment, leaders should consider fair treatment, which will result in a higher level of employee's job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

A better understanding of the relations among different types of organizational justice, facets of job satisfaction and organizational commitment factors are essential for organizational justice research. This study provides initial evidence about their causal relations. In further research, consideration should be given to clarify the effects of different types of organizational justice and facets of job satisfaction as predictors of the certain aspects of organizational commitment, as well as mediators of the relation of leadership styles and organizational commitment.

Results of this study provide clear and practical messages for managers. They suggest that an active leadership style is directly important for the development of the subordinate's organizational commitment. In addition, manager through his leadership style indirectly affects employee's organizational commitment, over fairness perceptions and overall job satisfaction. Obviously, the worst that can be done by managers towards employees attitudes is to avoid taking responsibility for leadership. Specifically, passive/avoiding leadership styles have neither direct nor indirect impact on the fairness perceptions and job and organizational attitudes.

It is, therefore, recommended that managers should focus on clarifying the role and task requirements, active vigilance and provide rewards when goals are

met (transactional), to demonstrate the high standards through personal example, create attractive vision with optimism and enthusiasm to encourage followers to solve problems and pay individual attention to their employees (transformational). In other words, managers should practice (active) leadership and avoid avoiding it.

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