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Transactional Leadership and Trainers' Performance: The Mediating Role of Trust in Leaders in Technical and Vocational Education Training Colleges in Ethiopia

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Abstract: Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges are central to developing a skilled workforce and driving economic growth. However, the performance of trainers in these institutions is often suboptimal, and the leadership dynamics that shape their effectiveness remain underexplored. While transactional leadership is traditionally viewed as an exchange-based approach focused on contingent rewards and management by exception, its potential to foster positive relational outcomes, such as trust, is less understood. This study investigates the relationship between transactional leadership and trainer performance in Ethiopian TVET colleges. It specifically examines the mediating role of trust in leaders in this relationship, drawing upon social exchange theory to argue that transactional leadership can, contrary to common assumptions, contribute to an environment of trust that, in turn, enhances performance. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed. Data were collected from 618 trainers randomly selected from public TVET colleges in Ethiopia using a multi-stage cluster, simple random sampling approach. The survey measured trainers' perceptions of their leaders' transactional leadership behaviors, their trust in those leaders, and their own self-reported performance. The hypothesized mediation model was tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings confirm that transactional leadership is positively and significantly associated with trainers' performance ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$) and trust in leaders ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$). Trust in leaders, in turn, is a significant predictor of performance ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the results support the mediating role of trust, with the indirect effect of transactional leadership on performance via trust being significant ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$, total effect $\beta = 0.50$, $p < 0.001$). The study challenges the simplistic view of transactional leadership as purely economic and detrimental, demonstrating its positive implications in the TVET context. It highlights the critical role of trust as a psychological mechanism that translates leadership behaviors into improved trainer outcomes. The findings offer practical insights for TVET administrators and policymakers on cultivating effective leadership and building trust to improve training quality.

Keywords: Transactional Leadership, Trust in Leaders, Trainer Performance, TVET colleges

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Trainers serve as critical agents of human capital development, directly transferring knowledge, workforce competencies, and organizational learning in contemporary organisations. The success of training programs is dependent not

only on the curriculum design and characteristics of trainees but also fundamentally on the performance of trainers themselves [1, 2]. A trainer who can deliver content clearly, adapt to trainees' needs, and achieve learning outcomes is an indispensable asset to any training program. On the other hand, poorly performing trainers decrease training investments, diminish learning transfer, and reduce organizational returns on development investments [3, 4].

However, despite the strategic importance of trainers, surprisingly little research has examined the factors that enhance or inhibit their performance. Most studies of leadership and performance have been among general employees in manufacturing, sales, or administrative roles, with trainers being an under-researched occupational group [5, 6]. This gap is problematic because trainers have several unique characteristics: they need to be both structured in adherence to learning objectives and spontaneous in response to trainee reactions; their performance is highly visible; and they often have moderate autonomy within well-defined parameters [7, 8].

One of the many organizational factors affecting the performance of employees is leadership style, which has been extensively studied both theoretically and empirically [9, 10]. Transactional leadership [11, 6] is a common approach to leadership in structured and goal-oriented environments. Three core behaviors characterize transactional leadership: contingent rewards (rewarding contingent on performance), active management by exception (monitoring for deviations and correcting them), and passive management by exception (intervening when standards are not met) [6, 12].

Transactional leadership seems to make intuitive sense in training contexts where learning objectives, session timelines, and assessment criteria are usually explicit. However, the literature presents a major paradox. On the one hand, transactional leadership is praised for providing clarity, reducing role ambiguity, and motivating performance through extrinsic rewards [13, 14]. However, it is also often criticized for being too mechanistic, which may undermine intrinsic motivation and not develop the trust and commitment associated with transformational leadership [15, 16]. This paradox is especially pronounced in regard to trust in leadership, a psychological state widely considered crucial for employee effort, risk-taking, and performance [17, 18, & 19].

1.2. Research Gap

The connection between transactional leadership and trust is still a subject of theoretical debate. Conventional leadership theories typically suggest that trust is fostered primarily through transformational or relational leadership actions, including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration [5]. In contrast, transactional leadership is frequently characterized as a purely economic transaction that may not create—and could diminish—relational trust [16]. However, a different viewpoint based on social exchange theory [20] implies different results. Social exchange theory states that when one side regularly and fairly abides by the rules over time, trust develops. Followers view a leader as dependable and equitable when they consistently apply rules, clearly monitor performance, and regularly deliver promised rewards. McAllister [21] argues that these impressions lead to the development of cognitive trust, which is founded on dependability rather than emotional connection.

Therefore, transactional leadership may actually increase trust in leadership when it is seen as consistent and equitable. If that alternate viewpoint is accurate, trust in leadership should operate as a mediator in the relationship between employee

performance and perceived transactional leadership. Trainers who believe that their leaders are transactionally effective cultivate trust, which drives improved performance through reciprocity norms. Nevertheless, no known study has empirically examined this mediated pathway among trainers, despite its theoretical validity.

Furthermore, previous studies that look at transactional leadership and performance have several methodological flaws that limit the validity of the findings. These include (a) convenience sampling, which restricts generalizability to target populations; (b) small sample sizes, which are prone to instability and low statistical power; (c) direct-effect-only models, which overlook possible mediating mechanisms; and (d) dependence on regression or correlation analysis rather than sophisticated mediation techniques such as structural equation modeling [22, 23].

1.3. Problem Statement

This study addresses the issue that, even though transactional leadership is frequently used in training settings and that trust is theoretically crucial for employee performance [17], there is insufficient, conflicting, or methodologically flawed empirical evidence regarding whether perceived transactional leadership improves trainers' performance and whether trust is the mechanism for this effect. In particular, previous research has ignored trainers as a distinct occupational category, used small convenience samples, and overlooked mediation experiments [22, 23]. Podsakoff et al. [24] cautioned that many leadership studies do not address frequent technique bias, which further undermines validity.

As a result, training organizations lack evidence-based guidance on whether and how transactional leadership might enhance trainer performance through trust when it is viewed as equitable and consistent. To address this issue, the present study uses a large sample ($N = 618$) and rigorous PLS-SEM analysis to statistically examine the mediated associations, adhering to the best methods for mediating tests suggested by [25] and [26].

1.4. Theoretical Framework

Two complementary theories—transactional leadership theory and social exchange theory—form the basis of this investigation. According to the notion of transactional leadership [11, 5], leaders and followers have an exchange relationship in which performance and compliance are rewarded. According to the theory, the best transactional conduct is contingent compensation, which entails setting clear expectations and offering tangible or psychological rewards for achieving goals. In their meta-analysis, [6] reported a moderately favorable correlation between contingent compensation and follower performance and satisfaction. In a structural organizational setting, transactional leadership was also found to be helpful [12].

According to social exchange theory [20, 27], when people follow reciprocity principles, relationships develop into mutual trust, loyalty, and commitment. Unlike purely economic exchanges, social exchanges involve unspecified obligations and trust that contributions will be reciprocated over time. In their thorough analysis, [28] contended that mutual commitment, trust, and long-term orientation set social exchange partnerships apart from economic partnerships. Gouldner [29] argued that the norm of reciprocity is a universal moral principle that governs social interactions. The current study integrates these theories and suggests that trainers grow to trust a leader who demonstrates consistent, fair, and rewarding transactional leadership. This trust, which is based on consistency and equity, then inspires trainers to perform better in return. This integration is in line with the findings of [30], which showed that

transactional leadership's procedural justice component promotes citizenship behaviors via trust. In a similar vein, [31] discovered that trust mediates the connection between labor outcomes and organizational fairness. **Figure 1** presents the conceptual model.

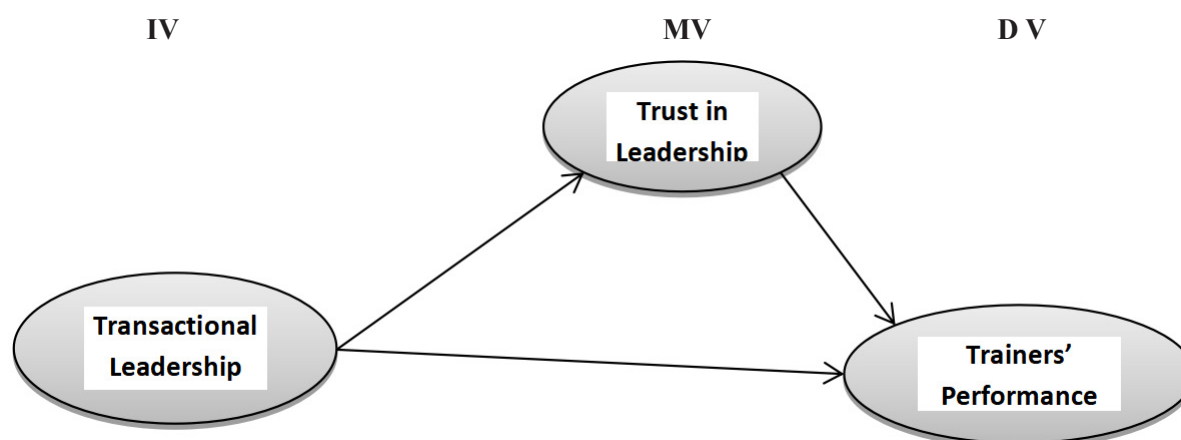


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Source: Own survey

1.5. Hypothesis

H1. Perceived transactional leadership is positively related to trainers' performance.

H2. Perceived transactional leadership is positively related to trust in leadership.

H3. Trust in leadership is positively related to trainers' performance.

H4. Trust in leadership mediates the relationship between perceived transactional leadership and trainers' performance.

2. Materials and methods

The proposed mediation model was tested via a quantitative cross-sectional explanatory approach. In line with this, theory-driven hypotheses on relationships between latent variables can be tested with this design [32, 25]. Although causation is recognized as a drawback, cross-sectional designs are frequently used in leadership research when the emphasis is on hypothesis testing rather than causal inference [33]. In line with the goals of the study, explanatory designs seek to explain variations in dependent variables through independent and mediating variables [34]. Moreover, the target population comprised trainers working in vocational training colleges in the West Amhara region. A total of 618 trainers participated in this study. To select these participants, a multistage cluster random sampling technique was employed. This technique is recommended by [35] and [36] when a complete sampling frame is unavailable and geographic dispersion is present [37]. In stage 1, geographic clusters were randomly selected. In stage 2, within each selected cluster, training colleges were randomly selected. In stage 3, all trainers within the final randomly selected clusters were invited to participate.

As recommended by [25] and [38], the sample of 618 exceeds the minimum requirement for PLS-SEM (10 times the largest number of structural paths pointing to a construct). Using the inverse square root method of [38], a minimum sample of 160 would be required for a power of 0.80 and an effect size of 0.10. Thus, $N = 618$ provides ample statistical power. Cohen [39] suggested that for medium effect sizes, 85 participants are sufficient for a power of 0.80; the present sample significantly

exceeds this threshold. All the constructs were measured via established Likert-scale instruments (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The use of established scales enhances construct validity and enables comparison across studies [40, 41]. **Table 1** indicated the sources of the instruments for the proposed variables.

Table 1. Instruments and sources

Variable	Instrument	No. of items	Source
Perceived transactional leadership	Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5x) transactional subscale	17	Bass & Avolio (2004)
Trust in leadership	Trust in supervisor scale	10	Podsakoff et al. (1990)
Trainers' Performance	Trainer performance-scale (adapted)	12	Campbell (1990)

Source: Own survey

2.1. Scale Adaptation and Translation Process

To ensure the instruments were contextually appropriate for the Ethiopian TVET setting, a rigorous adaptation process was undertaken. The original English version of the questionnaire was translated into Amharic, the official language of the federal government and widely spoken in the regions surveyed.

Forward Translation: Two bilingual experts, one a management researcher and the other a professional translator, independently translated the English questionnaire into Amharic. Both translators were native Amharic speakers with excellent command of English.

Synthesis and Committee Review: The two translations were compared by a committee comprising the researchers and a third bilingual expert. Any discrepancies in wording or meaning were discussed and resolved to create a single synthesized Amharic version.

Back-Translation: The synthesized Amharic version was then independently back-translated into English by two different bilingual experts who were blind to the original English text. The back-translated versions were compared with the original English questionnaire by the research team. Any inconsistencies were identified and resolved by refining the Amharic version to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence.

Pre-testing: The final Amharic version was pretested with a small sample of 20 trainers from a college not included in the main study. Participants were asked to comment on the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of each item. Based on their feedback, minor modifications were made to the wording of a few items to improve their clarity within the specific cultural and professional context.

This multi-stage process, following established guidelines for cross-cultural research [42], helped to ensure the content validity and linguistic equivalence of the final questionnaire. Three subject matter experts examined content validity [43]. Cronbach's alpha for all scales was greater than 0.78 in a pilot study of 60 trainers (not included in the final sample), surpassing the suggested cutoff of 0.70 [41, 40].

Additionally, in accordance with ethical standards for human subject research, formal consent was acquired from the institutional review board and cooperating training organizations [44, 45]. Moreover, a random generator was used to choose clusters at random. During regular business hours, 618 participating trainers received questionnaires. To reduce temporal confounding, completed surveys were gathered within a month [24]. After incomplete replies were removed, the response rate was

87.3%, which is regarded as outstanding for organizational research [46, 47].

Moreover, Smart PLS 4.0 was used to analyze the data [48]. Because the study focused on prediction and theory construction rather than confirmation and because the data did not match multivariate normality criteria, PLS-SEM was chosen over covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) [25, 49, and 50]. For complicated mediation models with latent variables, PLS-SEM is specifically suitable [51]. The method used was a two-step method [52]. Using the standards suggested by [25], the measurement model was first evaluated for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity: factor loading > 0.70 , composite reliability > 0.7 , AVE > 0.50 , and HTMT < 0.85 [51]. Second, the structural model was evaluated to test hypotheses, examining path coefficients (β , R^2 , f^2 effect sizes, and Q^2 predictive relevance) [53, 54, and 55].

As a result, standard errors, t statistics, and confidence intervals were calculated by bootstrapping with 5000 resamples, as suggested by [26] for mediation testing and [56] for PLS-SEM. Harman's single-factor test [24] and full collinearity VIFs [57], with a threshold of < 5 and variance explained VIF < 3.3 , respectively, were used to evaluate common bias techniques.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

The researchers distributed six hundred sixty-eight questionnaires to trainers at ten TVET colleges in the West Amhara region. Six hundred twenty-nine survey responses (94.2%) were received out of a total of 668 that were sent out, while 39 (5.8%) questionnaires were not returned. Among the received questionnaires, 11 (1.7%) were removed from the analysis because of their incompleteness. Thus, 618 responses (92.5%) were taken for the final surveys, which were valid. The majorities were male (62.4%), aged 31–40 years (45.2%), and had 5–10 years of training experience (58.7%). As indicated in **Table 2**, trainers perceived their leaders as moderately transactional ($M = 3.26$) and reported moderate levels of trust (3.34) and performance ($M = 3.52$). All three variables were significantly and positively correlated ($P < 0.01$), with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.49 to 0.57, with trust and performance sharing the strongest relationship ($r = 0.569$).

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
PTL	3.26	.531	1		
TIL	3.34	0.55	.511**	1	
TP	3.52	0.49	.495**	.569**	1

Note: $N = 618$; PTL = Perceived transactional leadership; TIL = Trust in leadership; TP = Trainer performance. $P < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

3.2. Measurement Model Assessment

The quality of the indicators and constructs in a PLS-SEM can be assessed via measurement model validity and reliability [58]. To evaluate a reflective measurement model, researchers have used the PLS-SEM method to examine four areas of measurement model assessment: indicator reliability, internal reliability, convergent

validity, and discriminant validity [59].

3.2.1. Indicator reliability / Factor loadings

How effectively each indicator represents the construct is demonstrated by indicator loadings or reliability. Generally, loadings above 0.708 are considered good, as this indicates that the construct explains more than 50% of the indicator's variance [58]. The measurement model was refined by removing items with standardized loadings below 0.70 to ensure robust convergent validity. As indicated in **Table 3**, all final factor loadings exceeded 0.70 (range: 0.72–0.89) and were significant at $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Indicator reliability

Indicators	TP	TIL	PTL
TP1	0.823		
TP2	0.733		
TP3	0.756		
TP4	0.763		
TIL1		0.880	
TIL2		0.894	
PTL1			0.816
PTL3			0.720
PTL2			0.806

Source: own survey

3.2.2. Internal Reliability

Internal reliability reflects how well the indicators measure the same construct [58]. The common metrics are Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. The optimal value is between 0.80 and 0.90, but values as low as 0.70 or 0.60 are acceptable in exploratory research [60]. **Table 4** shows that composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.70 to 0.79, exceeding the 0.70 criterion. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.68 to 0.77. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded 0.50 (PTL = 0.68, TIL = 0.72; TP = 0.77), confirming convergent validity.

Table 4. Internal reliability

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
TP	0.772	0.790	0.853	0.592
TIL	0.729	0.731	0.881	0.787
PTL	0.688	0.707	0.825	0.611

Source: own survey

3.2.3. Convergent validity

According to [61], this is comparable to the concept's communality, indicating

the extent to which the construct explains the variance of its indicators. The AVE, which is the grand mean of the squared loadings, can be used for this purpose, as recommended by [62]. If the AVE is at least 0.50, the construct accounts for at least half of the variance of its indicators. Consequently, the requirements for convergent validity were satisfied. The loading factors of the AVE for each construct are shown in **Figure 2**.

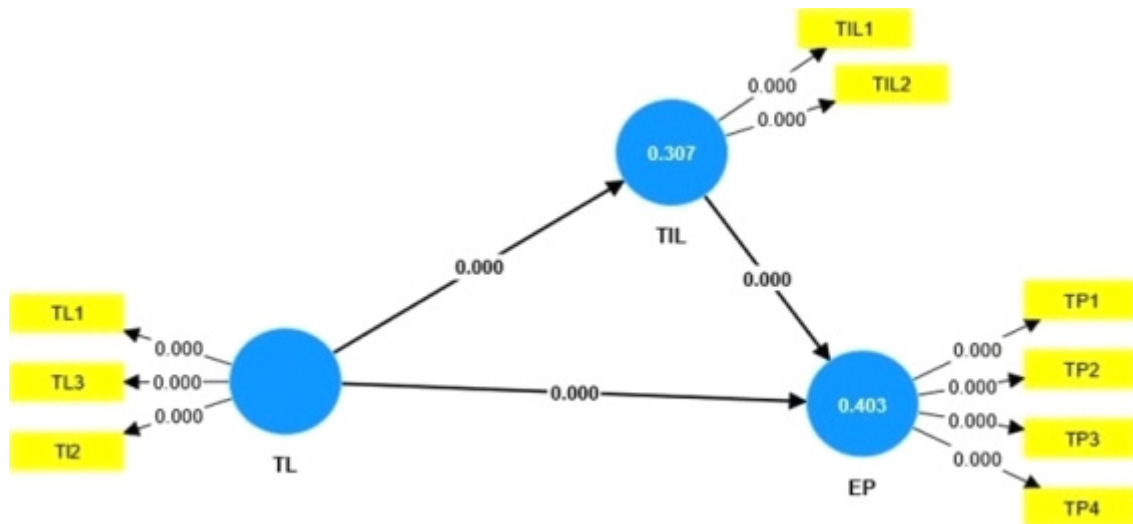


Figure 2. Measurement model

Source: own survey

3.2.4. Discriminant validity

According to [51], discriminant validity demonstrates how distinct a construct is from other constructs. The Fornell–Larcker criterion contrasts each construct's AVE with its squared correlation with other constructs. [63] State that the model exhibits discriminant validity if the square root of AVE (on the diagonal) is greater than the correlation between the construct and other constructs (off-diagonal). As shown in **Table 5**, discriminant validity was established (all diagonal values > off-diagonal correlations).

Table 5. Fornell–Larcker criterion

	TP	TIL	TL
TP	0.769		
TIL	0.580	0.807	
PTL	0.538	0.554	0.782

Source: own survey

3.3. Structural Model (Hypothesis Testing)

3.3.1. Collinearity assessment (VIF)

To address collinearity, variance inflation factor (VIF) estimation and tolerance are needed. If the VIF score exceeds 5, the model exhibits collinearity [64]. On the other hand, [57] suggested that if the VIF is less than or equal to 3.3, there is no collinearity. As shown in **Table 6**, all VIFs are lower than 5, and tolerance is greater

than 0.2, meaning that the model has no collinearity problem.

Table 6. Collinearity Test

Model	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Transactional Leadership Style	.492	2.034
Trainers' Trust in Leaders	.506	1.975

Source: Own Survey

3.3.2. Direct effects (H1, H2, and H3)

A significance test is necessary to determine standard error parameters via resampling since PLS-SEM does not assume a particular data distribution [62]. To generate a typical bootstrap error, 5000 subsamples were taken [63]. The current study employed bootstrapping in SmartPLS 4.0. As **Table 7** shows, perceived transactional leadership has a statistically positive and significant relationship with trainers' performance ($\beta = 0.312$, $t = 8.815$, $P < 0.001$). Moreover, perceived transactional leadership has a positive and significant relationship with trust in leadership ($\beta = 0.554$, $t = 19.531$, $P < 0.001$). Trust in leadership also has a positive and significant relationship with trainers' performance ($\beta = 0.406$, $t = 12.135$, $p < 0.001$). All three direct hypotheses were supported.

Table 7. Path coefficients (direct & indirect effects), t values, and p values

Hypothesis	Direct effect and indirect effect	Beta coefficient	T value	P value	Conclusion
Direct effect					
H ₁	TIL -> TP	0.406	12.135	0.000	Accepted
H ₂	PTL -> TP	0.312	8.815	0.000	
H ₃	PTL -> TIL	0.554	19.531	0.000	
Specific indirect effect					
H ₄	PTL -> TIL -> TP	0.225	11.758	0.000	Accepted

Source: own survey

3.3.3. Mediation effect (H4)

As indicated in **Table 7**, the indirect effect on the relationship between transactional leadership and trainers' performance is ($\beta = 0.225$; $t = 11.758$; $P < 0.05$). Hence, trust in leadership mediated the relationship, accounting for 58.4% of the total effect. This implies that while transactional leadership has a direct motivational effect, more than half of its impact operates through the psychological mechanism of trust.

3.4. Model Explanatory Power

With a sample size of 618 and an alpha level of 0.05, the statistical power of this study exceeded 99% for detecting medium effect sizes.

3.4.1. Coefficient of determination (R² value)

The variance in the endogenous variable explained by exogenous variables is

given by R^2 . According to [64], R^2 must be greater than 0.10. For endogenous latent variables, [65] suggested R^2 values of 0.26 high, 0.13 moderate, and 0.02 weak. **Table 8** shows that trainers' performance has an R-square value of 0.403, meaning that transactional leadership and trust together account for 40.3% of the explanation.

Table 8. R^2 values

	R-square	R-square adjusted
TP	0.403	0.402

Source: Own survey

3.4.2. Predictive relevance (Q^2 value)

The Stone–Geisser Q^2 values can be attained via blindfolding in SmartPLS 4.0. Values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 correspond to small, medium, and large predictive relevance [56]. As shown in **Table 9**, with Q^2 values of 0.399 and 0.494, both exceeding zero, the model has predictive relevance.

Table 9. Stone–Geisser (Q^2) summary

Endogenous variables	Q^2 predict	Conclusion
Trainers' Performance	0.399	Supported
Trainers' Trust in Leaders	0.494	Supported

Source: Own survey

3.4.3. The F square (f^2)

F^2 tells how much each predictor contributes to explaining the dependent variable. According to [65], effect sizes of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 are small, moderate, and large, respectively. **Table 10** shows that trust in leadership has a moderate effect on trainers' performance (0.192), while transactional leadership has a small effect (0.113). Moreover, transactional leadership has a large effect (0.444) on trust in leadership.

Table 10: f^2 square values

	f-square
TIL -> TP	0.192
PTL -> TP	0.113
PTL -> TIL	0.444

Source: Own survey

4. Discussions

This study examined the relationship between perceived transactional leadership and trainers' performance, with trust in leadership as a mediating mechanism. On the basis of a large probability sample ($N = 618$) and rigorous PLS-SEM analysis, all four hypotheses were supported. The following sections interpret each finding in light of the literature.

Trainers who perceive a higher level of transactional leadership report greater

performance, indicating a positive and substantial direct effect ($\beta = 0.312$, $t = 8.815$, $P < 0.001$). This result is in line with the meta-analysis presented by [6], who discovered a somewhat favorable correlation between follower performance and contingent incentive behaviors. Moreover, in another meta-analysis, [14] reported that task performance is positively related to transactional leadership, especially in structured organizational contexts. Crucially, this result refutes the widely held belief that knowledge workers are demotivated or ineffectual under transactional leadership [15].

Contingent rewards offer obvious performance signals in the training context, where learning objectives, session schedules, and trainee assessments need to be clearly structured. According to [12], transactional leadership works best in training environments when tasks are well defined and performance measures are objective-precise. This finding further supports the claim made by [13] that task performance is fundamentally preceded by role clarity, which transactional leadership offers. For trainers, role ambiguity is reduced, and performance execution is improved when they know exactly what is expected of them and what benefits follow successful delivery.

Moreover, the model's greatest direct effect ($\beta = 0.554$, $t = 19.531$, $P < 0.001$) indicates that trust in leadership is strongly influenced by perceived transactional leadership. This research challenges the common belief that transformational or relational leadership is the only way to foster trust [5, 16]. Rather, in line with social exchange theory [20], followers view leaders as dependable and trustworthy when they consistently deliver promised incentives, monitor them equally, and uphold transparent expectations. As [30] showed, fair procedural treatment, a fundamental component of transactional leadership, directly promotes trust in supervisors. In a similar vein, behavioral consistency, integrity, and fairness were found to be the main drivers of trust by [68] in their thorough analysis of trust antecedents. When used consistently, transactional leadership embodies all three.

In line with this, in their meta-analysis of trust research, [17] discovered that leader predictability and reliability were among the strongest predictors of trust for trainers in particular, which is almost exactly the same effect size as in this study. This was further reinforced by [69], who showed that significant variation in trust may be explained by distributive and procedural fairness, both of which are components of fair transactional leadership. This result is also consistent with cognitive trust theory [21], which differentiates affective trust (based on emotional ties) from cognitive trust (based on dependability). By proving that leaders can be relied upon to satisfy exchange duties, transactional leadership fosters cognitive trust. Lewicki and Bunker [70] called this "calculus-based trust," which serves as the basis for more complex types of trust.

The significant effect ($\beta = 0.406$, $t = 12.135$, $p < 0.05$) demonstrates that trainers' performance is strongly and directly predicted by trust in leadership. This result aligns with decades of studies on trust. In numerous studies, [17] reported a significant link between job performance and trust in leadership. [69] Discovered that, in addition to fairness perceptions, confidence in supervisors caused a distinct variance in task performance. This link is supported by a well-established theoretical mechanism. According to [18], trust encourages risk-taking, which improves performance. In particular, for trainers, trust allows them to experiment with new pedagogical approaches, ask for feedback without fear of repercussions, and modify training materials on the spur of the moment without constantly seeking approval. In the analysis of trust and performance, [19] reported that trust promotes cooperative

behaviors, lowers monitoring costs, and improves information sharing—all of which directly improve trainers' efficacy. Furthermore, [71] reported that confidence in leadership functions through three mechanisms: increased psychological safety, decreased defensive behaviours, and increased discretionary effort. Psychological safety is especially important in training situations since trainers may have to break from scripts to meet unforeseen trainee needs. Edmondson [72] discovered that learning and performance in team-based situations are directly predicted by psychological safety, which facilitates trust. This finding applies to trainers in training departments.

The association between trainers' performance and perceived transactional leadership is partially mediated by trust in leadership, indicating a substantial indirect effect ($\beta = 0.225$; $t = 11.758$; $P < 0.001$). This is the study's primary theoretical contribution. Partial mediation implies that transactional leadership operates via two complementary channels. This discovery combines social exchange theory with transactional leadership theory. According to [28], transactional leadership is more than just an economic trade; when it is viewed as fair and consistent, it becomes a social exchange that is marked by reciprocity and trust. In particular, partial mediation shows that although trust is a crucial mechanism, transactional leadership also directly motivates people without the need for trust. This is consistent with the goal-setting hypothesis of [73]: regardless of the relational environment, performance is directly improved by a defined objective and contingent reward. [74] Found that perceived organizational support and rewards have both direct and indirect (via trust) effects on performance.

Because trainers may react to contingent rewards even in the absence of high trust—a realistic fact in many organizational settings—full mediation is not evident. According to [75], leadership impacts are usually partially rather than totally mediated by leader–member exchange (LMX) quality, which overlaps with trust.

5. Conclusion

This study used trust in leadership as a mediating mechanism to investigate the relationship between trainers' performance and perceived transactional leadership. All four hypotheses were supported by a thorough PLS-SEM analysis and a large probability sample of 618 trainers. These results showed that trainers' performance is positively impacted by perceived transactional leadership and that trust in leadership is strongly positively impacted. The association between perceived transactional leadership and performance is partially mediated by trust in leadership, which accounts for approximately half of the total effect and positively predicts trainers' performance.

The findings cast doubt on the widely held belief that transactional leadership is detrimental only to the economy or erodes confidence. Transactional leadership improves performance through both direct motivational and indirect relational routes when it is applied fairly, consistently, and transparently. Furthermore, transactional leadership is a useful, efficient, and trust-building method for managing trainers for training firms. By combining transactional leadership with social exchange principles, the study advances leadership theory and offers practical advice for managers who want to simultaneously increase performance and trust. To further validate and expand these findings, future studies should include cross-cultural replication, multisource data, and longitudinal approaches.

Theoretical Conclusion

This research contributes to theory in several ways. First, it expands on social

exchange theory by demonstrating that trust can arise not only from transformational or relational leadership but also from regular and equitable transactional exchange. Second, by showing that perceived transactional leadership positively predicts trust among trainers, it refutes the notion that transactional leadership intrinsically degrades trust. Third, a more nuanced explanation of how transactional leadership affects performance is provided by the partial mediation finding, which shows that transactional leadership functions through two different pathways: a direct motivating pathway and an indirect pathway through trust.

Practical Conclusion

The results provide training organizations with practical recommendations. The improvement of contingent rewards, which connect particular performance measurements to material awards, should be taught to managers in a clear and consistent manner. Therefore, rather than being punishable, active monitoring must be fair and progressive, necessitating the use of similar rubrics by all trainers. Since more than half of the total effect operates through trust, managers build trust through predictability, transparency, and reliability. Furthermore, rather than giving up on transactional leadership practices in favor of a strictly transformational strategy, businesses should continue to use them. Frequent, quick trust surveys can act as early warning systems, enabling managers to take action before performance deteriorates. Finally, managers should use trust to facilitate adaptive performance and set clear goals for routine delivery. As their level of trust increases, they should gradually delegate session adaptation choices.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, because reverse causality cannot be ruled out, the cross-sectional design precludes conclusions about causality being drawn. A brief statement noting that future longitudinal or experimental research is needed to establish causal direction, as higher-performing trainers may experience different leadership behaviors or trust may shape leadership perceptions, would enhance the methodological rigor. Second, although Harman's single-factor test and full-collinearity VIFs indicate that common method bias is unlikely to be a serious concern, it would also be appropriate to acknowledge that the reliance on single-source, self-reported data remains an inherent limitation. Third, only trainers from vocational training institutions composed the sample, which limits its applicability to other professions, such as corporate learning specialists or instructors. Fourth, independent replication is required because the lack of non-significant results increases the risk of confirmation bias. Finally, the direct effect that cannot be explained by trust raises the possibility that additional mediators, such as role clarity or self-efficacy, are at work.

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