

Ethical leadership and organisational commitment: Mediating role of distributive justice in the Nigerian banking industry

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ABSTRACT

The discourse surrounding ethical issues in business has significantly influenced both management and social science literature. However, a notable gap remains in the exploration of the mediating role of distributive justice in the relationship between ethical leadership and organisational commitment, particularly in the context of deposit money banks in Nigeria. This gap prompted researchers to explore the mediating role of distributive justice in predicting the impact of ethical leadership on organisational commitment among Nigerian banks that accept deposits. The target population comprises fifteen banks that accept interest deposits. A sample size of 172 workers was drawn from the target population for the survey. Questionnaires were employed to gather data from the participants. Partial least-structured equation modelling was employed to examine the research propositions, using SmartPLS 3.2.9. The researchers' findings indicated that distributive justice served as a mediator in the relationship between ethical leadership and organisational commitment in an emerging economy. This research enhances our current understanding by illustrating how distributive justice mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and organisational commitment, particularly in the context of deposit money banks in Nigeria's emerging economy.

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1. Introduction

The issue of leadership has emerged as a significant focus for organisations of varying sizes, including small, medium, and multinational entities worldwide (Dialoke & Edeh, 2018). It was because of this concern that Ohio State University and the University of Michigan researchers in the 1940s identified two leadership orientations that managers in different industries deployed to influence their subordinates (Dialoke & Edeh, 2018; George & Jones, 2012). The Ohio State University's results revealed that managers in different industries influence their employees to work by initiating structure and consideration orientations (Dialoke & Edeh, 2018; Edeh, 2020). Meanwhile, the results from the University of Michigan show that business managers influence their subordinates with task- and employee-centered leadership orientations (Dialoke & Edeh, 2018). It was after these findings that some leadership typologies – ethical leadership,

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transformational leadership, leader-member exchange, participative leadership, and servant-leadership gained scholarly attention (Edeh, 2020;

McShane & Von Glinow, 2018; Robbins & Judge, 2018).

However, ethical leadership emerged because of the global corporate scandals that dislocated the financial structures of many businesses across the globe by their executives (Asuquo & Akpan, 2012; Eberchukwu et al., 2019). The major reason why the above-mentioned corporate scandals took place is that the executives who were entrusted with the organisation's wealth focused on their interests rather than the overall interest of the organisation (Agbaje & Oloruntoba, 2018). Ever since the scandals occurred, shareholders and stakeholders have lost faith in the leadership that oversees their investments (Saeed et al., 2022). It is on this basis that shareholders and other organisational stakeholders are in constant search of ethical leaders who would drive the goals of the organisation with ethics, which is the fundamental principle of right and wrong (Brown et al., 2005; De Hough & Den Hartog, 2008; Pakizekho & Barkhordari-Sharifabad, 2022; Starratt, 2004).

Nonetheless, research has shown that ethical leadership has contributed positively to organisational survival, resilience, prosperity, and sustainability (Geidam et al., 2021). It has been shown that ethical leaders or managers treat their subordinates fairly regarding distributive, procedural, and interactional fairness (Guo, 2022; Neves, 2025). This is the reason Danish et al. (2020) maintain that ethical leaders draw inspiration from their subordinates by encouraging them to make contributions during organisational meetings. Ugu and Tantua (2021) stressed that leaders of ethical conscience serve as role models to their subordinates through ethical conduct. Saleh et al. (2022) added that ethical leaders ensure that employees understand the job descriptions, which would enable them to perform their tasks effectively to avoid complaints and murmuring. Again, studies have shown that ethical leaders are considerate when it comes to employees' well-being, welfare, and work-life balance (Saeed et al., 2022; Taamneh et al., 2024). In addition, Asif et al. (2019) accentuate that managers who possess ethical principles build a reputation with the stakeholders. In support of the above argument, Danish et al. (2020) contended that managers who possess ethical leadership attributes can stimulate their employees to be committed to organisational values.

Nevertheless, ethical leadership has predicted other organisational outcomes such as effectiveness, productivity, performance, and commitment (Mwesigwa et al., 2020). Thus, organisational commitment (OC) has increased profitability and customer satisfaction (Amoah et al., 2022). Georges (2020) argued that the functionality of financial businesses depends solely on the commitment of employees. Prior research revealed that OC empowers employees to focus on the mission and vision of the organisation rather than on their objectives (Dinc, 2017; Edeh & Mlanga, 2019; Muda & Fook, 2020). Considering the above, Ramli and Mariam (2020) accentuate that high performance, as well as positive work behaviour, are the instruments of OC. It has been shown that organisational commitment discourages employees' high turnover in the organisation (Rebeka, 2019). Meanwhile, studies such as Saleh et al. (2022); Geidam et al. (2021); Danish et al. (2020); Asif et al. (2019); Abuzaid (2018); Agha et al. (2017); and Ismail and Daud (2014) investigated the influence, impact and effect of ethical leadership on other criterion variables, including organisational commitment, but this has created a lacuna in ethical leadership research. Some of the studies may have dissected ethical leadership with organisational commitment in other industries, countries, and geographical locations. However, what is glaring is that none of the studies mentioned above investigated the mediating role of distributive justice on the prediction of ethical leadership on organisational commitment in Nigeria, specifically focusing on interest deposit money banks in Nigeria. It is this gap that motivated the investigators to embark on this research. The reason why interest deposit money was chosen is that they are the major employer of labour in Nigeria, as well as the financial intermediaries that drive the Nigerian economy.

2. Literature review

2.1. Ethical leadership

Ethical leadership (EL) emerged in leadership literature because of shareholders' outcry for organisational leaders to imbibe ethical culture in the discharge of their duties. Research has shown that leaders who

adhere to fundamental principles of right and wrong are likely to be referred to as ethical leaders (Agha et al., 2017; Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al., 2020; Kinicki & Fugate, 2016; Saleh et al., 2022). What then is ethical leadership? Kim and Vandenberghe (2021) argued that ethical leadership is the process of adopting ethical conduct and initiating communication and decision-making with the members of an organisation. Originally, ethical leadership was perceived as the demonstration of ethical conduct by individual action, interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct through communication, reward, and decision-making (Mitonga-Monga et al., 2023; Saeed et al., 2022). Kim and Vandenberghe (2021) contended that ethical leadership is how the leader acts according to prescribed values, principles and rules governing the formal organisation. In another view, Guo (2022) perceived ethical leadership as a leadership behaviour that concerns ethical values. Using a different lens, Geidam et al. (2021) elucidated that any leadership behaviour that adheres to ethics is termed 'ethical leadership'. But Asif et al. (2019) have a different opinion. They assert that managers who demonstrate ethical leadership influence their subordinates through the principles of ethics. On the one hand, Saleh et al. (2022) accentuate that ethical leaders provide support, encouragement, and consideration.

Considering the above, Abuzaid (2018) maintained that ethical leaders focus on the ethical beliefs of society and those of the organisation. Other scholars have stressed that ethical leadership is an impression given to a leader whose attributes represent fairness, respect for the individual, and respect for societal ethics (Pitoyo, 2023; Ugu & Tantua, 2021). Advancing further, Danish et al. (2020) elucidated that, due to several scandals in organisations around the world, business owners are now searching for leaders who have an ethical culture. This means that ethical leadership is very significant, especially in the banking sector, where public money and other treasuries are kept for customers as well as government agencies (Danish et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2024). Corroborating the above argument, Agha et al. (2017) admitted that bank managers are now familiar with ethical leadership skills through career advancement programs. This conclusion is in line with Saleh et al. (2022) position on the need for financial institutions to advocate for ethical leaders in the functional areas of the organisation to preserve shareholders' wealth.

Based on the aforementioned arguments, substantiated ethical leadership attributes encompass integrity, trust, honesty, active listening, and respect (Brown et al., 2005); principles of critique, justice, and care (Starratt, 1991; 2004); innovation, collaborative power dynamics, and a focus on ethical and task-orientated approaches (Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al., 2020); as well as fairness, clarity of roles, and shared authority (De Hough & Den Hartog, 2008). This study has adapted the indicators of ethical leadership proposed by De Hough and Den Hartog, namely fairness, power sharing, and role clarification, which are recognised for their reliability and validity (Li, 2024). Fairness pertains to the way ethical leaders engage with their subordinates, emphasising respect, equity, and honesty (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Power sharing represents a scenario in which a principled leader allocates certain responsibilities to subordinates. Kinicki and Fugate (2016) observed that power sharing aligns with participative management, allowing employees to make suggestions that enhance organisational performance. Nonetheless, role clarification represents the managerial process through which an ethical leader articulates the specifics of executing a particular job.

However, numerous organisations, including financial intermediaries, have experienced rejuvenation due to ethical leadership (Abuzaid, 2018; Saleh et al., 2022). Using this premise, Saleh et al. (2022) examined the influence of ethical leadership on employee turnover within the Malaysian banking sector, revealing that it plays a crucial role in affecting employee turnover rates. Geidam et al. (2021) investigated the influence of ethical leadership on organisational commitment within the context of Nigeria, revealing that ethical leadership exerts a considerable impact on organisational commitment. Kim and Vandenberghe (2021) study examined the correlation between ethical leadership and organisational commitment in Canada, revealing that ethical leadership is a predictor of both affective and normative commitment. Danish et al. (2020) investigated the influence of ethical leadership on organisational commitment and workplace extra-role behaviour, revealing that ethical leadership serves as a predictor for both organisational commitment and discretionary work behaviour in Pakistan. Rabie and Malek (2020) investigated the impact of ethical leadership on the ethical conduct of employees in Pakistan, revealing that ethical leadership exerts a considerable influence on employee ethical behaviour. Asif et al. (2019) investigated the relationship among ethical leadership, affective commitment, work engagement, and creativity within the context of China, demonstrating that ethical leadership serves as a predictor for all

the criterion variables. Abuzaid (2018) investigated the relationship between ethical leadership and organisational commitment in the Jordanian banking sector, revealing a notable correlation between the two constructs. Agha et al. (2017) conducted a study examining the influence of ethical leadership on employee commitment in Nigeria, revealing that ethical leadership exerts a notably positive effect on employee commitment. Ismail and Daud (2014) investigated the impact of ethical leadership on organisational commitment within the Malaysian context, revealing that ethical leadership exerts a considerable effect on organisational commitment.

2.2. Organizational commitment

Organisational commitment (OC) refers to the degree to which employees align themselves with their organisation and their intentions to remain with the same firm (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Dinc (2017) asserts that OC refers to employees' emotional attachment to an enterprise that values them. Organisational commitment can be succinctly defined as the readiness of employees to embrace the culture of the organisation and actively engage in its advancement and development. For Soenanta et al. (2020), OC is employees' identification with the values guiding the behaviour of the organisation. Hafiz (2017) opined that OC is an employee's obligation to abide by, affirm, and demonstrate loyalty to the organisation. Scholars summarised that OC consists of an employee's emotional disposition towards the goals and aspirations of a formal enterprise (Chopra et al., 2024; Edeh & Mlanga, 2019; Hassan et al., 2019; Nassar et al., 2022; Raza et al., 2023). However, organisational commitment is more than an attachment; it also means protecting the firm's property and defending such an enterprise in society (Mwesigwa et al., 2020). Ramli and Mariam (2020) emphasise that commitment to organisational goals is a measure of strength that an employee is expected to display both inside and outside the workplace. Their study indicates that before an employee is said to be committed in the workplace, he/she must be vocal about what the organisation believes, such as ethical culture and corporate social responsibility. Again, it was shown that getting acquainted with organisational rituals and demonstrating them is another way to identify an employee who is committed to the organisation (Muda & Fook, 2020). In furtherance, Sukanebari and Konya (2020) contended that commitment is an agreement between the employee and the employer to work together towards organisational goals. Rebeka (2019) said that commitment is a partnership between management and employees.

From another perspective, Dalkrani and Dimitriadis (2018) admitted that organisational commitment is concerned with employee dedication to the objectives of the organisation in the absence of conflict. It was this argument that prompted Bashir and Gani (2020) to suggest that organisational commitment refers to the bond or cohesion that holds organisational members. Consequently, initially, scholars investigating organisational commitment established affective commitment, continuous commitment, and normative commitment as distinct dimensions of this construct (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Affective commitment refers to the emotional engagement of employees in the daily operations of an organisation (Sukanebari & Konya, 2020). Continuance commitment refers to the process by which an employee evaluates the expenses associated with departing from the organisation versus those remaining within it. Normative commitment, conversely, pertains to an employee's sense of duty to stay due to the career development opportunities afforded by the organisation (Rebeka, 2019).

2.3. Distributive justice

Distributive justice (DJ) serves as a significant positive predictor of various aspects of workplace dynamics, including motivation, discretionary work behaviour, employee engagement, retention, resilience, and organisational commitment (Laundon et al., 2019). Edeh et al. (2021) conceptualised DJ as the conduit through which managers articulate their leadership qualities to their subordinates. Previous studies have shown that managers and employees are usually at a crossroads when it comes to reward distribution, but the burden of trust is vested in the manager to ensure that the process leading to such a decision is equitable (Edeh & Ugwu, 2019). The term 'distribution' refers to how management allocates rewards to the employees (Edeh et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2022). In addition to rewards, there are other factors to consider. Ishak et al. (2018) added that distributive justice covers the process used to distribute

responsibilities in the workplace. Thus, employees' perception of how rewards and responsibilities are distributed determines their commitment to their jobs (Prihatiningtias & Julianto, 2020). Jannah et al. (2018) contended that the issue of distributive justice encompasses all aspects of equity regarding resources. Scholars has demonstrated that leadership influence without distributive justice may amount to an unproductive workforce (Yang et al., 2019). Tufan et al. (2023) suggested that DJ should be taken very seriously by managers and other organisational leaders to enhance a positive work climate that could lead to commitment. It is against the above premise that Shabbir et al. (2016) argued that DJ regulates the affairs of both the employees and managers, as well as shareholders. Omar et al. (2018) agreed with Shabbir et al. (2016) and affirmed that the commitment of employees to pursuing organisational goals is traceable to how fairly they were treated in terms of rewards.

2.4. Baseline theory

The baseline theories that underpinned this research are equity theory (Adams, 1963) and social exchange theory (Homans, 1958). In this study, equity theory affirms that employees are committed to organisational philosophy because of ethical leadership that is fair in sharing power and the equitable distribution of resources among all members of the organisation. Thus, leaders who demonstrate ethical leadership behaviours influence their subordinates because of equity in decision-making and the distribution of organisational outcomes. Conversely, the social exchange theory asserts that an analysis of costs and benefits forms the foundation of relationships (Soenanta et al., 2020). Concerning commitment, social exchange theory suggests that employees offer their skills and efforts to achieve organisational objectives in anticipation of receiving corresponding rewards from management (Kim & Vandenberghe, 2021; Ugu & Tantua, 2021). Another basis on which social exchange theory supports this research is that employees may find it very difficult to be committed to organisational goals when there are no expectations from management. This context led to the development of the following research hypotheses.

2.5. Fairness and affective commitment

Affective commitment is a function of fairness in the organisation (Dialoke & Edeh, 2017; Rebeka, 2019). Commitment associated with emotional attachment in the workplace depends on the justice exhibited by the ethical leader (Geidam et al., 2021; Tran Pham, 2024). George and Jones (2012) assert that employees prefer to work with a leader who is just in all aspects of the organisation's affairs. Robbins and Judge (2018) affirmed that managers who want their subordinates to be committed to organisational goals should endeavour to imbibe fairness in all ramifications of their behaviour. It is based on this contention that Pakizekho and Barkhordari-Sharifabad (2022) maintain that fairness forms the basis for emotional attachment to the goals and philosophies of the organisation. In a nutshell, Guo (2022) is of the view that an ethical leader who is not willing to showcase equity to workers is not worthy to be called an ethical leader. Aligning with Guo's contention, Ugu and Tantua (2021) suggested that employees tend to be loyal and obedient to a leader whose actions reflect equity. In addition, Danish et al. (2020) assert that ethical leadership influence is usually felt by subordinates who are emotionally attached to the course of the organisation. Again, Dialoke and Edeh (2018) are of the view that equity behaviour is one of the qualities that shareholders want in any manager who oversees their wealth. This means that bank managers and other top-level executives in the banking sector need to embrace ethical leadership that is anchored on fairness. In this regard, Abuzaid (2018) accentuates that bank managers require more ethical leadership than any other type of leadership to stimulate employees' affective commitment. This contention forms the basis for formulating the first research hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: *Fairness has a significant relationship with affective commitment.*

2.6. Power sharing and continuance commitment

Power sharing is an important element of ethical leadership that positively enhances employees' continuance commitment. Kim and Vandenberghe (2021) stated that delegation of authority is good to an extent because the subordinate to whom it was delegated would want to be committed to ensuring that

organisational goals are attained. Contrary to the above, Ramli and Mariam (2020) maintain that employees who are committed based on calculative behaviour may not be fully committed to the goals of the enterprise due to their secondary interest in migrating to another organisation. However, Abuzaid (2018) opposed the above argument and elucidated that continuance commitment can be sustained or discouraged when the leader is considerate of the subordinates' well-being. Considering the above, Kinicki and Fugate (2016) affirmed that when managers share power with their subordinates, it implies that succession planning would not be difficult. Power sharing reduces the workload of leaders and creates opportunities for subordinates to learn (Alhaidan, 2024; Ugu & Tantua, 2021). Danish et al. (2020) emphasise that ethical leadership behaviour that does not share responsibilities with subordinates threatens their loyalty, and hence, the subordinate would plan to quit. Geidam et al. (2021) argued that whenever calculative commitment thrives in the workplace, it is because there is no distribution of responsibilities from the leader to the subordinate. These arguments form the basis for formulating the second research hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: *Power sharing has a significant relationship with continuance commitment.*

2.7. Role clarification and normative commitment

Leaders who desire a change in the organisation must be willing to clarify the job roles of their subordinates to avoid role conflict. Again, role clarification by organisational leaders usually leads to improved normative commitment, which translates to high performance and profitability (Abuzaid, 2018). It is against this accentuation that Kim and Vandenberghe (2021) suggested that normative commitment could be an instrument of business sustainability if managers with ethical antecedents can leverage it. Supporting the above suggestion, Pakizekho and Barkhordari-Sharifabad (2022) contended that ethical leaders should always clarify subordinates' responsibilities so that there would be no conflicts. Asif et al. (2019) assert that role clarification engenders commitment of employees, which builds mutual trust and strengthens teamwork. It has been revealed that ethical leaders are the lamp through which the employees see the future; hence, their normative commitment is dependent on the ethical values of the leader (Robbins & Judge, 2018; McShane & Von Glinow, 2018). Another prominent leadership scholar, Edeh (2020), is of the view that when managers fail to clarify job roles, it becomes complicated for the subordinate to know what is expected to be done in the workplace. Other scholars opined that one of the fundamental roles of ethical leaders is to demonstrate their readiness to influence their subordinates through role clarification, thereby encouraging them to be normatively committed to the organisation. According to the preceding contention, the third research hypothesis is formulated.

Hypothesis 3: *Role clarification has a significant relationship with normative commitment.*

2.8. Mediating role of distributive justice on ethical leadership and organisational commitment

The essence of workplace leadership is to positively influence work activities, such as commitment, sustainability, resilience, and other organisational outcomes (Khan et al., 2022). Leadership influence is also linked to reward, which is one of the major lubricants of motivation (Ishak et al., 2018). Furthermore, Yang et al. (2019) suggest that individuals may perceive the rewards for completed or upcoming work as either equitable or inequitable. Thus, the enhancement of workplace commitment through ethical leadership needs to be diagnosed with distributive justice to enable employees to assess the ethical behaviour of their managers. To draw this distinction, Tufan et al. (2023) advocated that the presence of DJ in the formal workplace would checkmate leadership influence that is not predicated on the equitable allocation of rewards to employees, firm branches and departments. DJ has mediated the relationship between other investigations such as ethical leadership and organisational deviant behaviour (Tufan et al., 2023); core self-evaluation, work-family enrichment (Omar et al., 2018); dyadic relationship and individual outcomes (Ishak et al., 2018); supervisor support and presenteeism, coworker support and presenteeism (Yang et al., 2019); leader-member exchange, organizational commitment (Cankir & Alkan, 2018); personality and affective commitment (Jannah et al., 2018); corporate intelligence, employee

performance (Shabbir et al., 2016); emotion regulation, emotional exhaustion (Martínez-Íñigo & Totterdell, 2016); corporate citizenship behavior, CSR (Khan et al., 2022). From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the mediation of DJ on the prediction of ethical leadership on OC has not received wide empirical attention. Based on this vacuum, this research becomes necessary by revealing empirical evidence on the mediating role of distributive justice between ethical leadership and organisational commitment in emerging economies. To achieve this objective, the fourth research hypothesis is hereby proposed.

Hypothesis 4: *Distributive justice mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment.*

3. Research methods and design

3.1. Participants and sampling

This study utilised a cross-sectional survey design, as it facilitated the efficient collection of data from participants through a questionnaire within a limited timeframe (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The target population comprises 311 staff from fifteen (15) interest-deposit money banks in Enugu metropolis. The banks that accept interest deposits were chosen using a purposive sampling method. The determination of a sample size amounting to one hundred and seventy-two (172) was conducted in accordance with the methodology established by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

3.2. Ethical consideration

The researchers approached the management of the selected deposit money banks with the approved Ethical Research Committee Letter from the Department of Business Administration, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Nigeria, with approval No.: DBA-ERC000122. The researchers told the bank staff that taking part in the study would not harm them. Participants were told their and their banks' data would be kept private and not used in the study. The participants were further informed by the bank management that their participation is voluntary, which means that they are free to decline or withdraw from completing the questionnaire. Based on the aforementioned consent, the participants agreed to engage in the research. The questionnaire was administered to the participants by the bank management, and the researchers were informed to come back within one month to collect the copies of the completed questionnaire. A total of 172 questionnaires were distributed to the participants; however, only 165 were completed accurately and deemed suitable for analysis, while seven (7) were identified as invalid. Data was collected in the month of March 2025.

3.3. Measures and procedure

Regarding the measurement of variables, *De Hough and Den Hartog (2008) validated the Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ)*, which contained power sharing, role clarification, and fairness. Steinmann et al. (2016) also adapted and confirmed the validity and reliability of the above instrument. On the other hand, Allen and Meyer (1990) validated and made reliable *the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ)*, which contained affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment scales. Other scholars who have used the above instrument include Edeh and Mlanga (2019), Hafiz (2017), and Dialoke and Edeh (2017). *Distributive justice was described using five items adapted from Brashear et al. (2004)*. Several scholars, including Tran (2023), have adopted and validated these statements (See [Appendix A](#)). To ensure that the instrument is perfectly suited for our current study and to avoid any abnormalities, we examined common method bias using both procedural and statistical approaches after adapting the items. For the procedural approach, the respondents were assured of anonymity, and the items of the instrument were randomly arranged in order to reduce response bias. For the statistical approach, VIF was used to calculate the common method bias, as recorded in [Table 2](#). In the method of data analysis, frequency distribution was used to analyse participants' profiles in SPSS, while partial least-structured equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyse the research hypotheses with the aid of SmartPLS 3.2.9.

4. Results

The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that 79 respondents, accounting for 47.9%, are female, whereas 86 participants, comprising 52.1%, are male. The distribution of ages among the respondents reveals that 28 participants, accounting for 17.0%, are aged 47 years and above; 105 respondents, comprising 63.6%, are within the 37–46 year range; and 32 participants, representing 19.4%, fall within the 20–36 year category. The findings from the participants' professional experiences indicate that 33 individuals, accounting for 20.0%, have spent approximately 13 years or more in the banking sector. Additionally, 89 participants, representing 53.9%, have been engaged in the banking industry for a duration of 7 to 13 years, while 43 respondents, making up 26.1%, have worked in the banking field for a period ranging from 1 to 6 years. The educational qualifications of the participants indicate that 7 respondents, accounting for 4.2%, possess a PhD degree; 16 participants, representing 9.7%, hold a DBA (Doctor of Business Administration) degree; 34 participants, or 20.6%, have attained a master's degree; 87 respondents, making up 52.7%, possess a bachelor's degree; and 21 participants, constituting 12.7%, hold a diploma certificate.

Table 2 presents the outcomes of the factor loadings associated with the manifest items of the constructs. The findings indicate a satisfactory degree of factor loadings (Factor Loading > 0.70), in accordance with the recommendations put forth by Hair et al. (2018a). The indicators provide reliable and precise representations of the core principles of ethical leadership and organisational dedication. This aligns with the proposition put forth by Gefen et al. (2000) and Hair et al. (2018b).

Table 2 further elucidates the reliability and convergent validity of the research instrument, detailing aspects such as internal consistency, indicator reliability, multicollinearity, and convergent validity. Meanwhile, Table 3 presents an assessment of discriminant validity, all of which was meticulously evaluated to scrutinise the validity of the reflective measurement models. Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) were employed to evaluate internal consistency and indicator reliability, while the average variance extracted was used to assess convergent validity. The values of Cronbach's α and composite reliability must exceed 0.70 for the items to be deemed reliable (Hair et al., 2018a). Fornell and Larcker (1981) proposed a benchmark of 0.50 for the average variance extracted. The findings for the CA and CR demonstrated a satisfactory degree of reliability, consistent with the AVE, which indicated that all variables possess an AVE exceeding 0.5. The values of Roh A (Hair et al., 2017) should range from 0 to 1, signifying that the variables of the proposed research model exhibit internal consistency; a value approaching 1 indicates superior consistency. Lastly, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was employed to examine the presence of multicollinearity among the latent variables. The VIFs ranged from 1 to 5, indicating the presence of moderate multicollinearity. There exists a correlation among the predictor variables; however, it is not sufficiently severe to warrant concern (Gujarati & Porter, 2009; Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3 presents the findings from the discriminant validity assessment. The criterion established by Fornell and Larcker (1981) was employed to evaluate the discriminant validity of the latent variables. The square root of AVE signifies the mean correlation between a construct and its indicators in relation to the average variance elucidated by the construct. To assess discriminant validity, a comparison was made of the square roots of the respective AVEs. The criterion stipulates that should the correlation between two constructs fall below the square root of their AVE values, the constructs can be deemed to possess discriminant validity, signifying that they assess separate underlying concepts. Consequently, the constructs exhibited sufficient levels of discriminant validity, as evidenced by the square roots of the AVEs surpassing the correlation values among the other variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Kline, 2015).

4.1. Structural equation modeling (test of hypotheses)

Table 4 shows the partial least squares – structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) results of the test of the study's hypotheses. Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) is particularly well-suited for exploratory or predictive research settings, where the emphasis is on understanding and predicting relationships rather than confirming a well-established theory (Mueller & Hancock, 2008). Hypotheses one to three were tested in a cluster. The hypotheses stated that **Hypothesis 1: Fairness (FR) relates to affective**

Table 1. Respondents profiles.

Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Female	79	47.9
Male	86	52.1
Total	165	100%
Age (Years)		
47 & Above	28	17.0
37–46	105	63.6
20–36	32	19.4
Total	165	100%
Working experience (Years)		
13 & Above	33	20.0
7–13	89	53.9
1–6	43	26.1
Total	165	100%
Education		
PhD degree	7	4.2
DBA degree	16	9.7
Master degree	34	20.6
Bachelor degree	87	52.7
Diploma certificate	21	12.7
Total	165	100%

Table 2. Factor loadings, reliability, convergent validity, multicollinearity and convergent validity.

Constructs	Measurement Items	Factor Loadings (>0.70)	Reliability			Validity AVE (>0.50)	VIF (>3)
			Cronbach α (>0.70)	Rho_a (>0.70)	CR (>0.70)		
Fairness	FR 1	0.766	0.891	0.893	0.894	0.584	1.652
	FR 2	0.765					
	FR 3	0.773					
	FR 4	0.781					
	FR 5	0.747					
	FR 6	0.752					
Power sharing	PS 1	0.793	0.920	0.920	0.921	0.663	1.281
	PS 2	0.777					
	PS 3	0.854					
	PS 4	0.769					
	PS 5	0.889					
	PS 6	0.796					
Role Clarification	RC 1	0.738	0.861	0.865	0.866	0.565	2.672
	RC 2	0.799					
	RC 3	0.709					
	RC 4	0.743					
	RC 5	0.767					
Affective Commitment	AC 1	0.808	0.892	0.890	0.896	0.589	2.161
	AC 2	0.815					
	AC 3	0.744					
	AC 4	0.745					
	AC 5	0.733					
	AC 6	0.757					
Continuance Commitment	CC 1	0.774	0.889	0.890	0.892	0.580	1.773
	CC 2	0.780					
	CC 3	0.821					
	CC 4	0.724					
	CC 5	0.718					
	CC 6	0.749					
Normative Commitment	NC 1	0.799	0.890	0.890	0.891	0.576	1.285
	NC 2	0.757					
	NC 3	0.739					
	NC 4	0.744					
	NC 5	0.764					
	NC 6	0.749					
Distributive Justice	DJ1	0.701	0.837	0.839	0.841	0.528	1.189
	DJ2	0.884					
	DJ3	0.781					
	DJ4	0.721					
	DJ5	0.710					

commitment (AC); **Hypothesis 2:** Power sharing (PS) relates to continuance commitment (CC); **Hypothesis 3:** Role clarification (RC) relates to normative commitment (NC). The results indicate significant paths between fairness and affective commitment ($r=0.841$; $r^2 = 0.707$, $t=7.332$; $p<0.000$), power sharing and continuance

Table 3. Discriminant validity – fornell and larcker criterion.

Variables	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fairness	0.584	0.764						
Power Sharing	0.663	0.173	0.814					
Role Clarification	0.565	0.265	0.320	0.752				
Affective Com.	0.589	0.002	0.334	0.235	0.767			
Continuance Com.	0.580	0.312	0.508	0.022	0.128	0.762		
Normative Com.	0.576	0.333	0.311	0.112	0.102	0.100	0.759	
Distributive Justice	0.528	0.124	0.209	0.118	0.078	0.119	0.228	0.727

The off-diagonal entries represent the correlations among latent variables, whereas the diagonal entries (highlighted in bold) indicate the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Table 4. Predictive accuracy, predictive relevance and effect sizes (f^2).

Hypotheses	Correlation coefficient (r)	Predictive accuracy r^2	Adjusted r^2	P-values	T-values	Effect size f^2	Predictive relevance Q^2
FR -> AC	0.841	0.707	0.701	0.000	7.332	0.19 Medium	0.281
PS -> CC	0.771	0.594	0.590	0.000	8.543	0.36 Large	0.195
RC -> NC	0.693	0.480	0.473	0.000	7.123	0.18 Medium	0.167

Note: FR=Fairness, PS=Power Sharing, RC=Role Clarification, AC=Affective Commitment, CC=Continuance Commitment, NC=Normative Commitment. r^2 , 0.19=weak; r^2 , 0.33= moderate; 0.67=substantial, Chin (1998). Effect Size (f^2) of 0.02=small; 0.15=medium, while 0.35=large effect. $Q^2 > 0$ = satisfactory predictive relevance, Hair et al., 2018a.

Table 5. Mediating effect of DJ on EL and OC.

Paths	β	Sample mean	STDEV	t-values	P. Values	2.5% (lower CI)	97.5% (upper CI)	Decision
EL ->OC	0.514			6.025	0.001			Supported
Md. Eff. 1 EL ->DJ -> OC	0.768	0.765	0.061	12.547	0.000	0.648	0.888	Supported

Note: EL=Ethical Leadership, OC=Organizational Commitment, DJ=Distributive Justice. T-Statistics greater than 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance.

commitment ($r=0.771$; $r^2 = 0.590$, $t=8.543$; $p<0.000$), and role clarification and normative commitment ($r=0.693$; $r^2 = 0.473$; $t=7.123$; $p<0.000$). Thus, formulated hypotheses were supported. Furthermore, the results indicated that power-sharing has the highest effect size (0.36) on the measures of organisational commitment.

In accordance with the principles of structural models, Hair et al. (2020) argued that when the values of Q^2 (endogenous construct) exceed zero (>0), it indicates that the exogenous construct possesses predictive relevance for the endogenous construct. Table 4 presents the Q^2 values for all endogenous constructs, which vary from 0.281 for fairness to 0.167 for role clarification. Consequently, the positive Q^2 values indicate that the structural model can predict the indicators of the endogenous latent variables. Again, the r^2 (predictive accuracy) revealed a strong predictive accuracy of fairness on affective commitment. Power sharing and role clarification have moderate predictive accuracies for continuance and normative commitment. This finding demonstrates that fairness leads to higher variation in affective commitment. In other words, an increase in fairness suggests a corresponding increase in the unit of affective commitment.

Hypothesis 4: *Distributive justice mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and organisational commitment.*

Table 5 indicates the mediating role of distributive justice (DJ) on the ethical leadership (EL) and organisational commitment (OC) nexus. The bootstrapping with 5,000 sub-samples revealed a significant indirect effect ($\beta=0.768$, $T=12.547$, $p<0.000$, 95% CI [0.648, 0.888]). Being that the confidence interval does not include zero, the mediating effect is significant. Also, the direct effect is significant at $\beta=0.514$, $T=6.025$, $p<0.001$, implying partial mediation.

5. Discussion

Based on its findings, this study establishes a positive relationship between ethical leadership and organisational commitment. This suggests that an increase in ethical leadership would inherently lead to

improvements in organisational commitment. The study specifically revealed that fairness significantly influences affective commitment. This finding aligns with those of Saleh et al. (2022) and Geidam et al. (2021). The findings of Saleh et al. (2022) demonstrate that ethical leadership significantly influences employee turnover, whereas the results of Geidam et al. (2021) reveal that ethical leadership positively impacts organisational commitment. The findings of the second research hypothesis suggest that power-sharing exerts a notable influence on continuance commitment. This implies that a principled leader can effectively contribute towards achieving organisational objectives when they delegate authority to their subordinates. This aligns with the findings of Kim and Vandenberghe (2021) as well as those of Danish et al. (2020). Kim and Vandenberghe (2021) discovered a positive correlation between ethical leadership and both affective commitment and normative commitment. Conversely, the findings from Denmark et al. indicate that ethical leadership significantly influences organisational commitment and prosocial work behaviour. Ultimately, the findings of hypothesis three indicated that the clarification of roles exerts a considerable influence on normative commitment. This outcome aligns with the findings of Rabie and Malek (2020) as well as those of Abuzaid (2018). Research conducted by Rabie and Malek (2020) demonstrated that ethical leadership (EL) is a positive predictor of employee ethical behaviour. Abuzaid's research suggests a significant relationship between ethical leadership and organisational commitment. Furthermore, the findings of Hypothesis 4 indicate that distributive justice plays a significant mediation role in the relationship between ethical leadership and organisational commitment. Previous research substantiates this conclusion. Watto et al. (2019) identified that leaders who demonstrate integrity and fairness while prioritising the well-being of their employees in decision-making are more likely to foster a higher level of commitment among their workforce. Furthermore, Al Halbusi et al. (2018) posited that when employees perceive the allocation of rewards, workloads, and responsibilities as equitable, their commitment to the organisation is likely to increase. In a similar vein, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) posited that ethical managers who engage with employees in a fair and just manner are inclined to foster a culture in which rewards and responsibilities are allocated equitably. This principle of distributive justice subsequently fosters enhanced organisational commitment, as employees respond positively to equitable treatment. The present research builds upon these findings by illustrating that ethical leadership serves as a predictor of organisational commitment, mediated by perceptions of distributive justice. To put it differently, leaders that prioritise ethics can increase engagement by guaranteeing equitable results for their employees.

6. Conclusion, implications and limitations

This research establishes that ethical leadership, assessed through fairness, power sharing, and role clarification, serves as a predictor of organisational commitment, which is fundamentally rooted in affective, continuance, and normative dimensions. This finding suggests that ethical leadership possesses the capacity to encourage employees to adopt an ethical culture within the banking sector. This implies that bank managers possessing a strong ethical awareness would serve as exemplars for their subordinates within the professional environment. Once more, bank managers who engage with their employees equitably are likely to attain superior outcomes in comparison to their peers who adopt alternative leadership styles.

The findings also demonstrated that managers of service organisations in both developing and developed economies who clarify roles for their employees can prevent valued employees from leaving the organisation. This study implies that bank managers should be acquainted with ethical leadership dimensions to enable them to influence their employees ethically. Secondly, policymakers and bank executives in developing and developed economies should advocate for ethical leaders to avoid the mismanagement of shareholders' wealth. The study is limited to the use of the quantitative method, which is different from the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods that would have revealed a different result. Another limitation is the geographical scope, which did not represent the entire population of interest depositing money in banks in Nigeria. It was also observed that the number of questionnaires that were not filled properly also limited the results. However, the study suggests that future research should incorporate these shortfalls to fill the gaps already created by the present study.

Author contributions

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The study was conducted by the declaration and approved by the Research & Ethics Committee of the Department of Business Administration, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria (**No: DBA-ERC000122**). The authors confirmed that informed consent was obtained from all participants through the bank management verbally.

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Data availability statement

The data is available upon request from the corresponding author.

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