



DRIVING SUSTAINABLE RETENTION: A COLLABORATIVE ANALYSIS OF
TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP, TRAINING, AND DECENT WORK UNDER SDG-8

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Abstract

Given the changes in the work system, talent mobility, and employee expectations that were brought on by post-COVID-19, employee retention has emerged as a strategic sustainability concern, especially for service-sector organizations. This study uses Social Exchange Theory, Organizational Support Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory as its foundation to examine how training and development (T&D) and transformational leadership (TL) influence employee retention (ER) through organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), and how supportive work environment (SWE) as part of Sustainable Development Goal 8 moderates the process of developing citizenship behaviour. It is a quantitative, cross-sectional design, and the model has been tested using structural equation modelling (SEM) containing 384 participants from the service sector. The measurement model is reliable and valid, given that Cronbach's alpha values are between .858 to .884, composite reliability values are greater than .50, and the average variance extracted (AVE) values range from .899 to .915. The structural model accounts for 39.2% of the variance in OCB and 49.6% of the variance in ER. Factors that significantly predicted OCB were T&D ($\beta = .330, p < .001$) and TL ($\beta = .312, p < .001$). ER ($\beta = .522, p < .001$) was also highly correlated with OCB. SWE had a positive effect on T&D-OCB ($\beta = .139, p = .001$) and TL-OCB ($\beta = .096, p = .027$). Furthermore, bootstrapping showed that the relationship between T&D and ER and TL and ER were mediated by OCB. The study has implications for sustainable HRM as it demonstrates that training and leadership alone cannot lead to retention, but they can lead to citizenship behaviour when embedded in a decent, fair, and psychologically supportive work environment.

Keywords: Training and Development, Transformational Leader, Organizational Citizenship Behaviour, Supportive Work Environment, Employee Retention, SDG-8, Structural Equation Modelling.

1. Introduction

In today's competitive and evolving employment landscape, retaining staff has emerged as one of the most significant challenges in strategic planning. Service quality, service satisfaction, service institutional memory, and service continuity make this problem especially serious in-service sector organizations because employees' knowledge, attitudes, and discretionary effort play a significant role in continuity of service. In addition to the loss of human capital, when skilled and trained personnel depart, they also take with them the service routines, relationships, and tacit knowledge they had acquired, as well as customers' trust and confidence in the organization. Therefore, the replacement cost for employees is not just the recruitment and



selection cost; it also covers loss in the time spent learning, the reduction of service levels, the loss of motivation of other employees, and loss of productivity while the adjustment period is underway (Hom et al., 2021; De Winne et al., 2022).

The service-sector retention crisis has escalated into what could be described as a global crisis in the wake of COVID-19. Traditional employee retention methods like salary increases and job security have lost their effectiveness as a result of hybrid work, digital transformation, pressure on employees' mental health, high demand for skilled labour, and shifting employee expectations. Workers are increasingly demanding meaningful opportunities for development, fair treatment, psychological safety, leadership support, work-life balance, and decent working conditions. In developing economies, these pressures are greater due to resource constraints in organizations, less formal human resource systems, largely undeveloped leadership systems, and inadequate institutional systems to support employee wellbeing. Therefore, retention needs to be examined as a holistic and sustainability-driven phenomenon instead of just a human resource problem that resolves with a single "solution" (Carnevale & Smith, 2022; Vrontis et al., 2023).

One of the most visible forms of employee communication is through training and development. If employees feel that the organization cares about learning, growing their skills, and investing in their future, then they will most likely think that it is an investment in their support. But training and retention do not always go hand-in-hand. Employees can be in training and still leave due to an unfair, psychologically unsafe, or unsupportive work environment. This leads to a practical and theoretical question concerning when training can be an effective practice that supports retention (Boon et al., 2021; Carnevale & Smith, 2022).

Transformational leadership also plays a vital role in employee retention, as followers base the meaning of their day-to-day experiences on their leaders. Transformational leaders articulate a vision, offer personalized support, encourage thinking outside of the box, and call people to action beyond what is expected of their job. However, if leadership is to generate a direct effect on retention, it is likely to require the generation of behavioural attachment to the leader, cooperation, and organizational identification as an intermediary step. This missing piece in the behavioural paradigm is organizational citizenship behaviour. When employees assist their peers, are task-oriented, show initiative, protect organizational resources, and willingly participate in organizational goals, they may gain increased social and psychological commitment to the organization (Buil et al., 2020; Banks et al., 2024).

For this reason, the present study examines this issue by studying the moderated mediation of the relationship between T&D and OCB, TL and OCB, and SWE and ER. The study is related to SDG 8—Decent Work and Inclusive Economic Growth. This alignment is key as decent work is not just a macroeconomic goal but is also a driver within organizations through fair treatment, wellbeing, psychological safety, and inclusive working conditions (Hair et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022).

Problem Statement

While leaders and organizations are focusing on training and development to aid in minimizing turnover, it remains a challenge in many service sector organizations to retain their skilled workers. Some retention strategies assume that HR practices and the behaviours of HR managers are direct determinants of retention; others focus less on the mechanisms for the behaviours of HR managers to have a direct impact on retention. In developing economy service businesses, this situation is more serious as people in these countries can experience training and inspirational leadership but lack a sufficiently supportive environment to apply new skills, take initiative, and feel safe. Hence, two key questions arise: the question of "when" and the question of "how" T&D and TL affect retention, and which workplace conditions foster this influence. This study addresses the problem by investigating OCB as the behavioural pathway and SWE as the SDG-8 aligned condition that bolster the link between training and leadership to retention-facilitating behaviour.

Research Questions

RQ1: How does training and development affect organizational citizenship behaviour?

RQ2: How is organizational citizenship behaviour influenced by transformational leadership?

RQ3: Will there be a relationship between organizational citizenship behaviour and employee retention?



RQ4: Does organizational citizenship behaviour mediate the relationships of training and development and transformational leadership with employee retention?

RQ5: Does supportive work environment have an additive effect on the relationship between training and development and transformational leadership in OCB?

RQ6: What is the SDG-8 decent work perspective on why service-sector organizations promote sustainability of working life?

Research Objectives

1. To explain the impact of training and development on organizational citizenship behaviour.
2. To examine the effect of transformational leadership on organizational citizenship behaviour.
3. To test the effect of organizational citizenship behaviour on employee retention.
4. To determine whether there is a mediating role of organizational citizenship behaviour between T&D, TL, and ER.
5. To test the moderating role of supportive work environment in the relationships of T&D and TL with OCB.
6. To make employee retention familiar in the light of SDG-8 decent work and sustainable HRM framework.

Significance and Novelty

This study is important as it synthesizes the concept of retention from an isolated HR practice to an explanation derived from behaviour and context. It provides evidence for the fact that employees who value positive organizational treatment choose to respond by following citizenship behaviour, while the work environment is also fair, safe, and supports wellbeing; they will be more effective during any training and leadership activities. The novelty of this study is the integrated moderated mediation model, the SDG-8 approach to framing SWE, and the industrial location as service sector in a developing economy context. This is relevant because of the greater level of retention risk, increased pressure on service occupants, and the lack of satisfactory institutional frameworks for decent work implementation in the developing-country context.

2. Literature Review

Pay-based reasons have been superseded by the literature stressing employee development opportunities, leadership, organizational support, and employee wellbeing. Yet reviewers of many other studies still have the concept of T&D, TL, OCB, and SWE as four distinct concepts. The present review follows a synthesized one using the paradigm that these constructs have a relationship with each other within the domain of the explanation of sustainable employee retention.

Training, Leadership, and Citizenship Behaviour as an Exchange Process

Transformational leadership invites staff to the new, gives them meaning, motivation, and phenomenological support to get the job done, and T&D gives them skills and confidence in their career. Both practices are viewed as organizational investments in terms of Social Exchange Theory. The returns on these investments on the part of the employees are in the form of OCBs, which include helping others, taking initiative, protecting the organization's interests, etc. This is because OCB is not just another variable, but the behavioural manifestation of the notion of employee reciprocity. Training provides employees with the impression that the organization is investing in their future, while transformational leadership provides them with the opportunity to think about how to put their effort in line with the organization's goals. Citizenship behaviour is an outcome of their joint modelling (Boon et al., 2021; Carnevale & Smith, 2022; Hom et al., 2021; Alrowwad et al., 2020; Ng, 2021).

OCB as a Retention Mechanism

OCBs are beneficial to employee retention because employees who willingly participate in the organization become a more integral part of the social network. Helping behaviour creates peer relationships, role ownership through initiative, and more organizational loyalty through identification. These behaviours diminish employee-organization psychological distance. Retention is not just a choice; it's a product of ongoing behaviours involving participation in the organization. OCB can be used to understand why



employees with HR and leadership practices that affect them may become more likely to stay with the organization (Chahal & Mehta, 2021; Suifan et al., 2023).

The Decent Work Paradox

A supportive work environment is fair; it is a safe place to be; it is a supportive wellbeing environment; it is treated with respect; and it has a good work/life balance. All of these are related to SDG-8, where decent work not only involves having a job but is about being able to do a decent job without fear, exploitation, or emotional strain. This results in the "decent work paradox": the organization can train the employee and inspire them in the right way, but if conditions are not supportive of the extra-role behaviour, the employee can choose not to do it or might even want to leave all the same. This means the workplace becomes an enabler, turning HR investment and leadership into citizenship behaviour and sustainable retention (Cooper et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022; Nielsen et al., 2023).

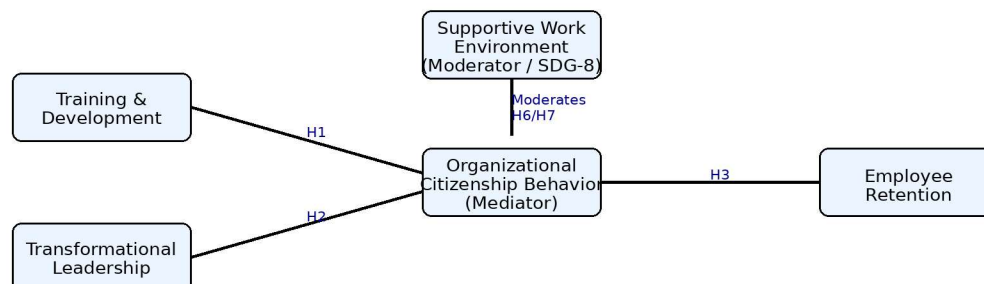
Developing-Country Context

It is worth paying attention to the context of the developing country, as a service sector organization may be constrained in terms of resources, workload, HR systems, leadership quality, and employee wellbeing systems. Under these circumstances, the importance of positive workplace culture is even greater. Psychological safety is not directly correlated to employee marketability, but training without it can have that effect as well. Likewise, although transformational leadership can inspire employees, it can become less effective when there are not fair and decent working conditions in the organization. Having SWE as a moderator is supported by this contextual explanation (Van der Heijden et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022; Babalola et al., 2022; Banks et al., 2024).

Hypotheses Development

- H1:** Training and development have a significant positive influence on organizational citizenship behaviour.
- H2:** Transformational leadership has a significant positive influence on organizational citizenship behaviour.
- H3:** Organizational citizenship behaviour has a significant positive relationship with employee retention.
- H4:** Organizational citizenship behaviour mediates the relationship between training and development and employee retention.
- H5:** Organizational citizenship behaviour mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention.
- H6:** Supportive work environment moderates the relationship between training and development and organizational citizenship behaviour.
- H7:** Supportive work environment moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational citizenship behaviour.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Indirect (Mediation): TD → OCB → ER (H4) | TL → OCB → ER (H5)



Note. OCB is predicted by T&D and TL respectively, and OCB is a mediator of the path from T&D and TL to ER respectively, while SWE is a moderator of the T&D and TL to OCB paths, respectively.

3. Research Methodology

The research design of the study was positivist, deductive, quantitative, and cross-sectional. The positivist approach works fine as the study is carried out using theory-based hypotheses, measurable constructs, and statistical relationships. The deductive approach is appropriate as the proposed model is based on Social Exchange Theory, Organizational Support Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and the SDG 8 "Decent Work" perspective.

The population included full-time workers in service-type organizations. Those that had placement time in their organizations for at least a year were deemed to have relevant experiences to training practices, leadership behaviour, work conditions, and attitudes that affect retention, and were thus considered suitable for this study. The number of participants for SEM was 384, which is adequate for an SEM model that contains multiple latent variables, mediation, and moderation.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, which ran along a scale of 1-5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Five items were used to measure each of the following variables: T&D, TL, SWE, OCB, and ER. The attached Excel file contains the SEM-ready dataset, the codebook, the construct scores, the interaction terms, and the tables of statistical output.

Reliability of the constructed construct was checked using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for analysis. Average variance extracted was used as the test of convergent validity. Discriminant validity was examined using the HTMT method. Standardized path coefficients, R^2 values, bootstrapped indirect effects, and moderation interaction terms were used as tests of the structural model. The moderating effects were estimated by creating standardized interaction terms for $TD \times SWE$ and $TL \times SWE$.

4. Results

Respondents Profile

The SEM comprised 384 valid responses from a sample of service-sector workers. A summary of the profile of the respondents is presented below.

Table 1

Respondent Demographic Profile (N = 384)

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	170	44.3%
	Male	214	55.7%
Age Group	21-30 years	117	30.5%
	31-40 years	158	41.1%
	41-50 years	83	21.6%
	Above 50 years	26	6.8%
Education	Bachelor	116	30.2%
	MS/MPhil	77	20.1%
	Master	181	47.1%
	PhD	10	2.6%
Sector	Banking	82	21.4%
	Education	75	19.5%
	Healthcare	57	14.8%
	Hospitality	51	13.3%
	IT Services	64	16.7%
	Telecom	55	14.3%



Experience	1-3 years	101	26.3%
	4-6 years	138	35.9%
	7-10 years	99	25.8%
	Above 10 years	46	12.0%
Designation	Executive	109	28.4%
	Manager	61	15.9%
	Officer	132	34.4%
	Supervisor	82	21.4%

Measurement Model

A measurement model was tested prior to testing the structural relationships. The recommended criteria for reliability and convergent validity were found for all constructs. Cronbach's alphas were between .858 to .884, which is considered good internal consistency. All the CR values were between .899 and .915 and all the AVEs were between .640 and .684. The results indicate that the constructs were measured with high levels of reliability and that the indicators were able to reflect adequate variance of their corresponding latent variables.

Table 2

Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Minimum Loading	Maximum Loading
TD	.870	.906	.659	.774	.850
TL	.884	.915	.684	.794	.881
SWE	.858	.899	.640	.757	.832
OCB	.868	.905	.656	.751	.864
ER	.862	.901	.646	.743	.832

Discriminant validity was assessed through HTMT. All HTMT values were below the conservative .85 threshold, indicating that the constructs were empirically distinct.

Table 3

HTMT Discriminant Validity Matrix

--	TD	TL	SWE	OCB	ER
TD	1.0	.400	.354	.559	.524
TL	.400	1.0	.392	.536	.537
SWE	.354	.392	1.0	.400	.369
OCB	.559	.536	.400	1.0	.776
ER	.524	.537	.369	.776	1.0

Structural Model

The structural model accounted for 39.2% of the variance in OCB and 49.6% of the variance in ER. The values of these R² indicate the model has good explanatory power and that the combination of training, leadership, workplace support, and citizenship behaviour is an explanatory model for retention.



Table 4

R-Square Values

Endogenous Construct	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Interpretation
Organizational Citizenship Behaviour	.392	.384	Moderate explanatory power
Employee Retention	.496	.492	Moderate-to-substantial explanatory power

The direct path results show that T&D significantly predicted OCB ($\beta = .330, p < .001$), supporting H1. TL also significantly predicted OCB ($\beta = .312, p < .001$), supporting H2. OCB had a strong positive effect on ER ($\beta = .522, p < .001$), supporting H3. These findings show that both HR development and leadership practices contribute to retention mainly by building citizenship behaviour.

Table 5

Direct and Moderating Path Coefficients

Hypothesis/Path	β	SE	t-value	p-value	Decision
Training & Development → OCB	.330	.044	7.525	<.001	Supported
Transformational Leadership → OCB	.312	.044	7.014	<.001	Supported
Supportive Work Environment → OCB	.145	.044	3.327	<.001	Supported
TD × SWE → OCB	.139	.043	3.243	.001	Supported
TL × SWE → OCB	.096	.043	2.222	.027	Supported
OCB → Employee Retention	.522	.045	11.658	<.001	Supported
Training & Development → Employee Retention	.139	.042	3.286	.001	Supported
Transformational Leadership → Employee Retention	.176	.042	4.204	<.001	Supported

Mediation and Moderation Effects

The mediation and moderation were assessed using bootstrapping. OCB was the intervening variable in the indirect effect of T&D on ER, confirming H4 as significant ($\beta = .174, 95\% \text{ CI } [.123, .231]$). The indirect effect of TL on ER via OCB was also significant ($\beta = .162, 95\% \text{ CI } [.112, .219]$), which confirmed H5. The results of this study align with other research that has found OCB to be a behavioural channel for making the connection between HR and leadership practices and retention.

The interaction effect of T&D and SWE was significant ($\beta = .139, p = .001$) and the support for Hypothesis 6 was positive. Training has a greater impact on OCB when employees have a positive perspective of the work environment. The interaction effect between TL and SWE was also significant ($\beta = .096, p = .027$), supporting H7. Therefore, transformational leadership has a higher chance of eliciting citizenship behaviour when the organizational environment of fairness, psychological safety, and decent work principles is maintained.

Table 6

Bootstrapped Indirect and Interaction Effects

Effect	Bootstrap Mean	95% LLCI	95% ULCI	Decision
TD → OCB → ER	.174	.123	.231	Supported
TL → OCB → ER	.162	.112	.219	Supported
TD × SWE → OCB	.138	.054	.227	Supported
TL × SWE → OCB	.096	.006	.184	Supported

5. Discussion

These results offer a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the phenomenon of sustainable employee retention. Based on these results, it was conclusive that both T&D and TL cannot be considered as independent retention predictors. Rather, they operate through OCB and function more effectively in a SWE. This is the key contribution of the study, as it not only shows that HR and leadership practices are important, but also their trajectory of importance.



This is because T&D has a significant effect on OCB (also referred to as the logic of Social Exchange Theory). Those who are provided with substantive development experiences are more likely to respond with spontaneous and cooperative actions. The moderation result indicates that this exchange takes place with conditions, however. Fairness, safety, and wellbeing support in the training environment is vital; training alone isn't enough. This reinforces the decent work paradox: there could be decent training for workers, but the training may increase workers' capabilities without improving their sense of attachment and dignity at work.

Results from the contribution of TL on OCB clearly validate that leadership still plays a great role in motivating and engaging employees in their behaviour. Transformational leaders engage employees, give them purpose, and stimulate employees' discretionary efforts. However, as the strong interaction between TL and SWE demonstrates, there is a need for a supportive organizational context for transformational leadership to be effective. Leaders can inspire employees, but they can foster psychological safety and organizational support that will lead to a greater likelihood of employees turning those inspirations into OCB.

The strong support of the OCB → ER path validates the notion that retention is not simply an attitudinal result. This is linked to employees' behavioural engagement in the organization. Staff who support others, are proactively engaged, and defend organizational resources develop greater social bonds and organizational identification. This behavioural entanglement raises their intention to remain. Hence, it is suggested as a leading indicator of sustainable retention, and organizations should see citizenship behaviour this way.

The results are also inserted in the context of organizational behaviour and the framework of SDG-8. Decent work is a concept as well as being a policy; it is a concept that is enacted at the workplace level through fairness, safety, wellbeing, respect, and supportive leadership. Under such circumstances, workers will more easily convert organizational treatment to citizenship behaviour and long-lasting membership. So, in order to obtain sustainable retention, human development is combined with quality of leadership, staff's reciprocity, and decent working conditions.

6. Conclusion

Based on the hypotheses, this study was conducted using an integrated model of moderated mediation between T&D, TL, OCB, SWE, and SDG-8, which would determine the factors that influence employees by retaining them. The findings confirmed that in the context of OCB, the impact of T&D and TL were significant. The impact of OCB on ER was also found to be significant. The model explained 39.2% of the variance in OCB and 49.6% of the variance in ER. The results also validated the effect of SWE on the TD→OCB and TL→OCB relationships.

The study finally establishes that training and leadership are not the only ways to sustain retention. Positive HR and leadership behaviours convert to citizenship behaviours in a decent, fair, and supportive environment, and employees stay with the organization. Thus, organizations that place value on long-term retention of employees should adopt a combination of elements—namely, investing in training, developing skills through transformational leadership, and implementing policies to improve the work environment aimed at SDG-8.

7. Theoretical Implications

The study extends Social Exchange Theory by introducing the reciprocity of employees to the sustainability discourse. Where the workplace demonstrates decent work conditions, positive organizational treatment will be followed through to citizenship behaviour; otherwise, it will not. Reciprocity extends beyond economic or psychological motivators to underlie context- and sustainability-related motivators.

The study also advances Transformational Leadership Theory by exhibiting leadership's influence on retention through OCB. Transformational leadership contributes to OCB, and OCB helps to increase retention. The model goes beyond direct-effect leadership explanations and names a behavioural mechanism which brings leadership to long-term effects.



Last but certainly not least, SDG-8 and micro-level organizational behaviour are linked and thus contribute towards sustainable HRM. It demonstrates the ways in which decent work can be implemented in a SWE, and how this environment enhances the impact of training and leadership practices.

8. Practical Implications

Organizations should view T&D as a strategic retention tool and not as a normal function of HR. Skill-building and career planning, mentoring, and putting learning into application should all be part of a training program. From the results of this study, one can see that if training is to have an impact on citizenship behaviour, it needs to be accompanied by an unprecedented and psychologically safe environment.

Programs for developing leadership capabilities need to centre on positive transformational leadership behaviours, including inspirational communication, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and ethical role modelling. There may be an opportunity to institutionalize SDG-8 aligned leadership audits to assess if leaders are creating equity, inclusion, and decent work opportunities.

Bullying awareness campaigns, wellbeing courses, and respectful workplace training should also form part of a good organization's overall T&D initiatives. Such actions and gestures can lead to an employee being able to feel safe in taking charge, encouraging others, and going the extra mile.

Systemic retention should be employed. HR should not only use salary or promotion or even a single training session. Rather, they should create a comprehensive retention mechanism which involves workplace policies on decent work, monitoring of citizenship behaviour, actions of transformational leadership, and development opportunities.

9. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study relies upon cross-sectional survey data, and this type of data does not yield strong causal inferences. Follow-up studies are needed with longitudinal designs to investigate if intention to remain truly leads to reduced turnover measured over 12 months post-training and leadership interventions.

This study is based on self-reported data that can result in common method bias. Supervisor-rated OCB may be added in future studies, along with HR data and actual turnover. Multi-source data can enhance the credibility of the model.

This study is restricted to service sector workers. The model should be further tested in organizations from the manufacturing sector, public sector, education, healthcare, and technology. Comparative studies across developing and developed economies can also provide results on the causal mechanisms of supporting environment for SDG-8 by institution setting.

The model can be expanded in the future to add work engagement, psychological empowerment, perceived organizational support, meaningful work, or employee wellbeing as mediators.

Contribution of Authors

All the authors participated in the ideation, development, and final approval of the manuscript, making significant contributions to the work reported.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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