

Organisational justice mechanisms' mediating leadership style, cognition- and affect-based trust during Covid-19 in South Africa

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to investigate how different kinds of leadership styles (transformational and transactional leadership) influence different components of trust (affect-based and cognition-based trust), mediated by organisational justice mechanisms (distributive, procedural and interactional justice) during COVID-19 conditions in South Africa.

Design/methodology/approach: This study conducted a quantitative study by collecting survey data from 366 leaders in three organisations in South Africa, using valid and reliable scales. Given the number of latent constructs, the statistical technique used for this research was partial least squares-structural equation modelling, which enabled the authors to evaluate the strength and significance of the mediating relationships.

Findings: Findings show unexpectedly that neither distributive nor procedural justice has any significant mediating effect between transformational and transactional leadership and between the components of trust (affect-based and cognition-based trust). However, interactional justice was found to have a significant positive mediating effect between transactional leadership and affect-based trust as well as cognition-based trust. The same did not apply to transformational leadership.

Originality/value: Given the context of this study, which was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, these findings support the notion that it is the responsibility of leaders in organisations to communicate effectively, clearly and transparently to their followers at all times but particularly during times of extreme uncertainty. These increased levels of perceived fairness result in the development of trust within the organisation.

Keywords: Leadership, Transformational leadership, Transactional leadership, Organisational justice, Affect-based trust, Cognition-based trust

Introduction

The current Covid-19 pandemic context, in which leadership is expected to motivate followers to perform at higher levels under conditions of uncertainty, requires business to reconsider relevant leadership styles and attributes (Chamorro-Premuzic and Gallop, 2020). One of the critical outcomes of effective leadership is trust. Frei and Morris (2020) explain that trust is formed between individuals, as well as between individuals and organisations, when leaders demonstrate to team members that they are capable of performing their duties, are authentic so that their followers experience the “real them”,

and, lastly, that they care about the people they lead. Furthermore, Rousseau *et al.* (1998) define trust as having two parts; the first is a willingness to become vulnerable, which is based on the second part, which is to have positive expectations of others.

The ability to build trust is vital in the current pandemic-affected business context, in which more and more teams function in virtual environments. Trust is thus one of the critical success ingredients in this new normal. The current study was inspired by the seminal work of Ng (2017), who investigated certain organisational justice mechanisms and components of trust. While Ng's (2017) study was conducted under normal circumstances, the current research took place in an extreme context, and shed new light on existing relationships in times of uncertainty. SA, like most other countries, experienced stringent lockdown periods due to the pandemic, during which many organisations, including the three involved in this study, had to shift to remote working conditions. An extreme event is "a discrete episode or occurrence that may result in an extensive and intolerable magnitude of physical, psychological or material consequences to or in close physical or psycho-social proximity to organisation members" (Hannah *et al.*, 2009).

According to the latest Edelman Trust Barometer report, the perception of trust has shifted significantly over the last 20 years (Edelman, 2020). Where the focus in 2001 was on the rising influence of non-governmental organisations, it shifted towards trust at work in 2019 and competence and ethics in 2020 (Edelman, 2020). This dynamism over time also shows how trust is influenced by context, especially given the social nature of trust in society and the workplace. Edelman (2020) found that the percentage of predictable variance in organisational trust can be explained by competence (24%), integrity (49%), dependability (15%) and purpose (12%).

Employee perceptions of trust and justice are determined by the attributes and behaviours demonstrated by their leaders in organisations. The purpose of this research was therefore to create a deeper understanding of which leader attributes and behaviours act as enablers or barriers to trust and are mediated by organisational justice mechanisms. The literature review revealed limited research as in most cases the focus has only been on the mediating effect of distributive and procedural justice. Ng (2017, p.403) also indicated that this is an area for further investigation, calling for "disentangling the effects of different types of justice on different types of trust". For this study, we therefore included a third mediating justice mechanism, interactional justice, to fill this research gap. Interactional justice refers to transparent exchanges between individuals (Moorman, 1991) which influences trust between them.

Organisational justice mechanisms, and their effect on trust, are of specific interest and warrant further investigation as recommended by Ng (2017), because it has been found that only certain types of mechanisms influence certain types of trust (Kim *et al.*, 2018; Matta *et al.*, 2020). Organisational justice mechanisms are important because they reflect the perceived level of fairness maintained in an

organisational context. The level of fairness, in turn, contributes positively to trust, as has been shown for certain organisational justice mechanisms (Ng, 2017).

The aim of this research, therefore, was to understand the effect of organisational justice mechanisms on the relationship between leadership and trust during Covid-19.

Literature review

Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory forms the theoretical foundation of this study and has its own foundations in the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). The theory of social exchange with roots in sociology (Blau, 1964) has become an essential construct used to explain human behaviour in the work context (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Social exchange theory can be described as the interdependent actions between people. Blau (1964) also notes that social exchange relationships require individuals to trust one another because of the mutual dependency or expectations created as a result of the exchange relationship. Therefore, resources are exchanged, in most cases, on the basis that the giving party expects something in return from the receiving party and this ongoing relationship of exchange builds trust over time (Rousseau *et al.*, 2018; Rousseau *et al.*, 1998).

Leader-member exchange theory is built on social exchange theory and refers to the dyadic relationship between leaders and their followers (Dansereau *et al.*, 1975; Graen and Scandura, 1987; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Ng, 2017; Schriesheim, Castro, and Cogliser, 1999). It is relevant to the current study because of the exchange relationship that exist between leaders and their followers. For example, if an employee performs their job satisfactorily, they are rewarded at the end of the month in the form of a salary. This aligns well with the contingent reward characteristic of transactional leadership. Where low levels of leader-member exchange are present, the leader-follower relationship is very much task-performance-orientated. In cases of high leader-member exchange, high levels of trust, interaction and support are present (Martin *et al.*, 2018).

Transformational and transactional leadership

Transformational leadership includes idealised influence, which evokes strong emotions in followers, and inspirational motivation, or the ability to articulate the importance of organisational goals to followers (Ng, 2017; Vinger and Cilliers, 2006). Other components of transformational leadership are individualised consideration, which refers to behaviours that demonstrate to followers that their leaders really care about them by listening to what they need on an individual level (Bass *et al.*, 1987; Ng, 2017), and intellectual stimulation, or the ability of a leader to motivate followers to find new and better ways of performing organisational tasks, as well as looking at problems in new ways (Bass *et al.*, 1987; Ng, 2017). Important outcomes of transformational leadership include, intrinsic motivation of

followers, improved creativity in the work context, as well as an improved level of trust between leader and followers. Other outcomes include a feeling of empowerment and self-efficacy experienced by followers of transformational leaders and organisational commitment (Koh *et al.*, 2019; Tepper *et al.*, 2018). Transactional leadership comprises contingent reward, manifested through behaviours that tell followers what to do and link specific financial rewards to the delivery of specific tasks (Bass *et al.*, 1987). Another component is management-by-expectation, which refers to leadership behaviour that reinforces tried-and-tested ways of performing tasks, is typically closed to changes in process and tends to stick to traditional ways of doing things (Bass *et al.*, 1987).

Ng's (2017) study only focused on transformational leadership. For the purpose of this research, we included transactional leadership, given that leaders operate on a continuum between transformational and transactional leadership most of the time (Vinger and Cilliers, 2006). Effective leaders adjust the degree of transformational and transactional leadership they portray according to the context in which they operate at specific points in time (Oc, 2018). By including transactional leadership as a latent construct, the study aimed to extend Ng's (2017) findings to further contribute to theory development.

Cognition and affect-based trust

The definition of trust proposed by Mayer *et al.* (1995, p. 712) is: “[T]he willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party”.

In recent years, trust has also been defined as the willingness of one individual to expend effort, expecting that it will be reciprocated by another individual, without any firm commitment (Mozumder, 2018). It can be argued that the organisational justice mechanisms can be viewed as measurements of perceived fairness. This perceived fairness increases the likelihood of individuals to put themselves in vulnerable positions, while expecting a positive outcome.

One of the most cited articles on trust is that of Mayer *et al.* (1995). In this work, the authors refer to three enablers of trustworthiness: ability, benevolence and integrity (Alarcon *et al.*, 2018; Costa *et al.*, 2018; Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Schoorman *et al.*, 2007). It is important to note that trustworthiness is based on the perceptions of the trustor, relevant to the trustee (Alarcon *et al.*, 2018). As mentioned earlier, trust actions are built on social exchange theory, with specific focus on the relevant acts performed between the trustor and the trustee. The exchange of these trust actions ultimately result in reciprocal trust between the two (Alarcon *et al.*, 2018).

Cognition-based trust can be described as a measure of peer reliability and dependability (Costa *et al.*, 2018; McAllister, 1995). This measure is built on things like the experience of the relevant peer and their qualifications (Dirks, 2000; Kim *et al.*, 2018; McAllister, 1995). Cognition-based trust is sometimes also linked to the position the individual holds within the organisation (Kim *et al.*, 2018), and is therefore important in the leader-follower dyad as the follower typically reports to the leader.

It has also been found that trust, in general, is built up between individuals over time (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998). For this reason, it is expected that the various organisational justice mechanisms have a positive mediating influence between leadership and trust, given that it is representative of fair exchanges between leaders and followers over time. One can therefore argue that this will increase the likelihood of individuals to put themselves in a position of vulnerability, by trusting each other.

Cognition-based trust includes the ability of the leader as perceived by the follower. For this reason, cognition-based trust was included as a latent measurement construct for trust to measure the mediating effect that organisational justice mechanisms have between leadership and cognition-based trust.

Affect-based trust is built upon reciprocated interpersonal care between individuals (McAllister, 1995; Vogelgesang *et al.*, 2020). This can also be described as mutual trust, defined as the combination of felt trust (the measurement of trust felt by the follower and offered by the leader) and trust in the leader (a measurement of follower trust in the leader) (Kim *et al.*, 2018; Rousseau *et al.*, 1998). It is also important to note that cognition-based trust is needed for affect-based trust to develop between individuals (McAllister, 1995).

Affect-based trust plays an important role in the relationship between leadership and trust, as Mayer *et al.* (1995) explain that one of the enablers of trust is the benevolence of the leader as perceived by the follower. For this reason, we included affect-based trust as a latent measurement construct for trust when measuring the mediating effect that organisational justice mechanisms have between leadership and trust.

Organisational justice mechanisms

Organisational justice mechanisms arose from equity theory as well as uncertainty management theory (Matta *et al.*, 2017). Equity theory concerns itself with the perceived fairness of the treatment experienced by individuals (Moorman, 1991), while organisational justice refers to how fairness is experienced within organisations.

Delving deeper into the literature to heed Ng's (2017) call to research the effects of different types of justice on different types of trust we found that organisational justice can be broken down into four elements (Colquitt, 2001), procedural justice, distributive justice, interpersonal justice and interactional justice (Matta *et al.*, 2017; Ng, 2017).

As existing research has focused mainly on procedural and distributive justice mechanisms (Ng, 2017), the current study includes interactional justice as well. Colquitt (2001) argues that interpersonal justice can also be seen as part of procedural justice, given that it concerns the process followed in the allocation of resources as perceived by the individuals in the organisation (Colquitt, 2001). For this reason, we did not add interpersonal justice as a mediating latent construct.

There is a strong link between organisational justice mechanisms and the tenets of social exchange theory, in that social exchange relationships are strengthened by fair treatment between individuals (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; He *et al.*, 2014; Rubenstein *et al.*, 2019; Tepper *et al.*, 2018). The distributive justice mechanism concerns the fairness of the process followed to allocate the resources for employees to perform their functions (Greenberg, 1990; Matta *et al.*, 2017). If implemented properly, distributive justice strengthens trust between employees and the organisation (Rousseau *et al.*, 2018).

Another dimension of distributive justice, and how it positively impacts the relationship between leaders and followers as a result of fair treatment, can be explained by the group value model (Fulmer and Ostroff, 2017; Tyler *et al.*, 1996; Tyler, 1989). This suggests that followers perceive fair treatment as symbolic value as it signals their worth within the organisation, which in turn motivates them to work harder and expend more effort to deliver on the tasks set by the leader (Ng, 2017).

We therefore hypothesise that distributive justice has a strong mediating effect between types of leadership (transformational or transactional leadership) and the components of trust (cognition-based and affect-based trust).

Hypothesis 1a: Distributive justice has a positive mediating effect between transformational (i) and transactional leadership (ii) and affect-based trust.

Hypothesis 1b: Distributive justice has a positive mediating effect between transformational (i) and transactional leadership (ii) and cognition-based trust.

The procedural justice mechanism has been described as the process used to decide where to allocate resources within the organisation (Fulmer and Ostroff, 2017; Matta *et al.*, 2017; Ng, 2017). Procedural justice is also closely connected to strategic leadership, because leaders are seen to be empowered and

expected to make decisions about how and where organisational resources are deployed (Samimi *et al.*, 2020). It can be argued that this allocation of resources takes place at all levels of leadership in an organisation; however, the magnitude of such resource allocation increases the higher leaders move up in the organisation.

Furthermore, it has been found that transformational leaders uphold high ethical standards, which in turn supports fair resource allocation within the context of the organisation (Ng, 2017). It can therefore be hypothesised that procedural justice has a mediating effect between leadership styles and the components of trust.

Hypothesis 2a: Procedural justice has a positive mediating effect between transformational (i) and transactional leadership (ii) and affect-based trust.

Hypothesis 2b: Procedural justice has a positive mediating effect between transformational (i) and transactional leadership (ii) and cognition-based trust.

Interactional justice leans more towards interactions between people in the organisation (Moorman, 1991). Given that trust can be described as vulnerability in the expectation of positive outcomes (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998), we added interactional justice as a third mediating variable between leadership and trust.

Interactional justice refers to the appropriateness and truthfulness of the information shared, so as to justify the allocation of resources and the process followed. Put another way, interactional justice considers the fairness of the manner in which procedures are implemented, with the focus on the leader rather than the organisation (Moorman, 1991). The manner in which leaders implement procedures must therefore be truthful and justified (Colquitt and Rodell, 2011; Colquitt and Zipay, 2015). The focus of the research to date has mainly been on distributive and procedural justice mechanisms, but we hypothesise that interactional justice should also be considered as a key latent construct.

Interactional justice is also connected to the concept of trust on the basis of transparent exchanges between individuals. Trust is the willingness to be vulnerable while not having all the information at hand in the leader-follower dyad (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998). Another reason why interactional justice is of interest is because it functions at an individual level, between leaders and followers, whereas distributive and procedural justice mainly function at an organisational level (Moorman, 1991).

Given that individualised consideration is an attribute of transformational leadership, and the nature of interactional justice which considers the fairness of the manner in which leaders allocate resources

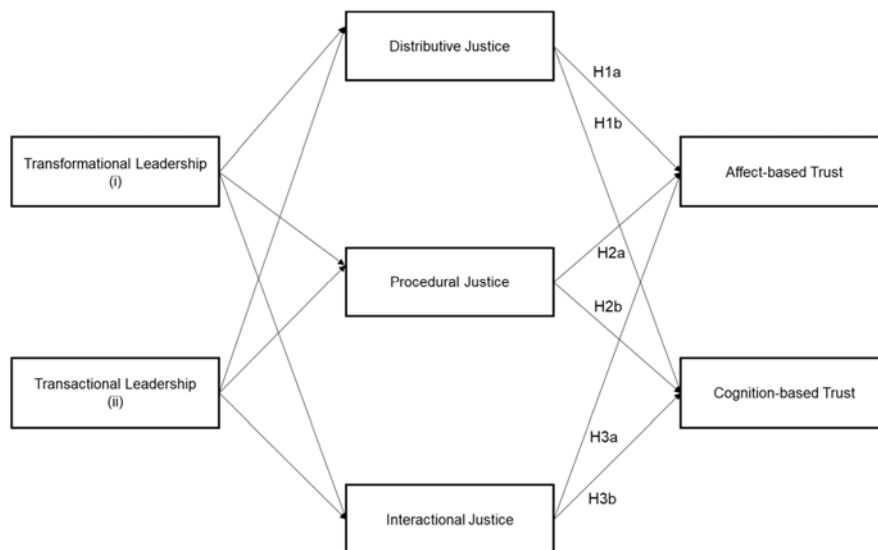
(relating to transactional leadership), it was therefore expected that interactional justice would have a positive mediating effect on both transformational and transactional leadership and the components of trust.

Hypothesis 3a: Interactional justice has a positive mediating effect between transformational (i) and transactional leadership (ii) and affect-based trust.

Hypothesis 3b: Interactional justice has a positive mediating effect between transformational (i) and transactional leadership (ii) and cognition-based trust.

The relationships between the constructs are illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study (Authors' own compilation)



Method

Research design and methodology

The research philosophy, or worldview, adopted for this study is positivism (Bagozzi, 2011; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). A quantitative study was conducted to test the strength and significance of the relationships between leadership and trust, as well as the mediating effect that organisational justice mechanisms may have on them (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The mechanisms chosen as mediating variables for this research were selected, firstly, based on Ng's (2017) call for further investigation and,

secondly, because of the critical role leadership plays to implement measures to build sustainable organisations.

The study applied existing valid and reliable survey questionnaires to test for, and explain, the relationships between the proposed constructs (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The independent variables, also referred to as the exogenous variables in structural equation modelling (Hair *et al.*, 2020), were transformational and transactional leadership. Exogenous variables do not have any path relationships pointing towards them (Hair *et al.*, 2011). The mediating variables were types of organisational justice mechanism and the effect of these on the components of trust, the dependent variables, also known as the endogenous variables in structural equation modelling (Hair *et al.*, 2020).

Given the complex relationships that exist between the various latent constructs, the statistical method used was structural equation modelling (SEM). More specifically, partial least square SEM (PLS-SEM) was employed to test for and validate the strength and significance of the relationships between the constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2020, 2011; Hooper *et al.*, 2008). PLS-SEM is also referred to as variance-based SEM, as it maximises the explained variance between the endogenous variables within a path model (Hair *et al.*, 2020; Shmueli *et al.*, 2019). If the research focus is prediction and theory development, PLS-SEM is better suited than covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) as CB-SEM is more suitable for confirming relationships between latent variables (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

SEM can also be used to reduce the number of observed variables into a smaller number of latent variables by observing the amount of covariation between the observed variables (Hair *et al.*, 2020; Schreiber *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, SEM is very good at measuring the mediating effects of variables. Given that the aim of this research was to measure the effect of organisational justice mechanisms on the relationship between leadership and trust, PLS-SEM was the correct statistical method of analysis (Cheung, 2007; Hair *et al.*, 2011; Schreiber *et al.*, 2006).

In the context of structural path models, the inner model refers to the paths between the latent constructs evaluated using PLS-SEM. Because the indicator variables that represent the latent constructs are reflective in nature, the outer loadings are considered as a measurement of how accurately the indicator variables reflect the measured latent construct, also known as a Mode A measurement model (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

The population for this study included all junior, middle, senior and executive management members of three prominent organisations in SA, consisting of 943 individuals. This population was selected because the research aimed to investigate how the perception of implemented organisational justice mechanisms influences trust, as exhibited by leadership and perceived within the organisation. The

study therefore needed to capture individuals' perceptions about their leaders in the organisations in which they worked.

A random sampling method was used (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This was achieved by sending the questionnaire electronically to the entire population, giving every individual an equal opportunity to respond, which resulted in a probabilistic sample (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Provided there were sufficient responses, the results gathered from the sample could be generalised to the rest of the population (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The unit of analysis for the research was the individual member of the junior, middle, senior and executive management teams. As mentioned above, because organisational justice mechanisms are enforced at the organisational level, the research questionnaire was used to measure the various mechanisms as perceived by the individual members to align the unit of analysis with the other constructs. The questionnaire gathered some demographic data to confirm the relevance of participants for the study. As this was a quantitative study, numeric data was collected on an interval Likert scale which in turn was appropriate for the research design (Schreiber *et al.*, 2006). Participants were asked four demographic questions: age, gender, length of service at their organisation and management level.

Questionnaire items and scale

A seven-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 – very strongly disagree, to 7 – very strongly agree. The questions used to measure the latent constructs of transformational and transactional leadership were adapted from an existing, published academic article (Vinger and Cilliers, 2006) and were originally based on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 6S), developed by Avolio, Bass and Jung (1999).

For transformational leadership, questions included, “My leader makes me feel good about myself”, which measured idealised influence, and, “My leader provides a clear indication of what I could and should do at work”, which measured inspirational motivation.

The transactional leadership questions included, “My leader tells me what I need to do, to be rewarded for my work”, which measured contingent reward, and, “My leader is satisfied when I meet agreed-upon standards of work”, which measured management-by-exception.

The questions used to measure the perception of the three organisational justice mechanisms were adapted from Moorman (1991) as well as Niehoff and Moorman (1993). Five observed variables were used to measure the latent construct of distributive justice, seven to measure procedural justice and six to measure interactional justice. Questions included, “I am fairly rewarded, given my responsibilities”,

which measured distributive justice; “Our company procedures are designed to collect accurate information necessary for making decisions”, which measured procedural justice, and “My leader considers my viewpoint”, which measured interactional justice.

The questions used to measure the perception of the two trust components in the organisations were adapted from McAllister (1995). Five observed variables were used to measure the latent construct of affect-based trust and six to measure cognition-based trust. Questions included, “My leader and I have a sharing relationship. We can both freely share our ideas, feelings and hopes”, which measured affect-based trust, and, “My leader approaches his/her job with professionalism and dedication”, which measured cognition-based trust.

To ensure the research questionnaire was suitable, fifteen individuals were asked to complete a pilot survey (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Feedback was positive, with only minor changes suggested for the words used in the statements. Respondents noted that even though the number of questions was significant, the statements were short, easy to understand and to the point. The data gathering process involved emailing links to the questionnaire to groups of individuals in three organisations. The electronic survey tool used was Qualtrics and an anonymous link to the survey was created for each of the organisations.

Following distribution of the survey, two follow-up reminders were sent to raise the response rate as high as possible. In total, 465 responses were received, of which 112 were incomplete. However, if the respondent completed 51% or more of the questionnaire, it was possible to replace the balance of the values with the average of the other respondents, based on some demographic identifier (Hair, Gabriel, *et al.*, 2019). The total sample was therefore 366 responses, representing a response rate of 38.81%.

Results

Using the statistical software package IBM SPSS Statistics (SPSS), discriminant validity for each of the indicator variables against the total item score was evaluated for each of the research constructs making use of bi-variate correlations. This was done using Pearson’s correlation and two-tailed tests, by running item total per construct against each question that made up that construct.

For both transformational and transactional leadership, it was found that all of the individual questions were significantly correlated to the item total score per construct. Therefore, validity was established for transformational leadership and for transactional leadership.

Validity was also established for distributive justice, interactional justice and procedural justice. Finally, validity was established for cognition-based trust and affect-based trust. Another test for discriminant validity was also available from the SmartPLS 3 output, known as the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT)

Ratio. This test for discriminant validity evaluates the correlations between the respective latent constructs (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). To indicate discriminant validity in this test, all reported values should be less than 0.9, with some scholars proposing 0.85 (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). As can be seen from the table below, this was the case for all latent variables except for the correlation between transformational leadership and transactional leadership, which may be explained by the leadership continuum that exists between transformational leadership and transactional leadership (Vinger and Cilliers, 2006).

Table 1: HTMT ratio for all latent constructs

HTMT	Affect-based Trust (ABT)	Cognition-based Trust (CBT)	Distributive Justice (DJM)	Interactional Justice (IJM)	Procedural Justice (PJM)	Transformational Leadership (TFL)
Cognition-based Trust (CBT)	0.84	-	-	-	-	-
Distributive Justice (DJM)	0.49	0.44	-	-	-	-
Interactional Justice (IJM)	0.86	0.87	0.55	-	-	-
Procedural Justice (PJM)	0.56	0.53	0.50	0.63	-	-
Transformational Leadership (TFL)	0.83	0.84	0.46	0.87	0.55	-
Transactional Leadership (TRC)	0.82	0.80	0.56	0.87	0.57	0.95

For convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) was considered as part of the output from SmartPLS 3. As indicated in the table below, the AVE for all latent constructs was significant and greater than 0.5, which indicates that the latent construct explains at least 50% of the variance of its observed variables (Hair *et al.*, 2011; Hair, Risher *et al.*, 2019).

Table 2: Average variance extracted for all latent constructs

Latent Construct	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
Affect-based Trust (ABT)	0.79	0.79	0.02	43.84	0
Cognition-based Trust (CBT)	0.67	0.67	0.02	39.69	0
Distributive Justice (DJM)	0.84	0.84	0.02	47.93	0
Interactional Justice (IJM)	0.77	0.77	0.02	35.97	0
Procedural Justice (PJM)	0.77	0.77	0.02	37.27	0
Transformational Leadership (TFL)	0.69	0.69	0.02	33.48	0
Transactional Leadership (TRC)	0.52	0.52	0.02	23.17	0

The statistical analysis software package SmartPLS 3 was used to test instrument reliability. Internal reliability was measured for each of the latent constructs that formed part of the research questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha is commonly used with Likert scale questions to measure the reliability of the scale (Hair *et al.*, 2017; Hair *et al.*, 2011).

Table 3: Cronbach's alpha for all latent constructs

Latent Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho_A	Composite Reliability
Affect-based Trust (ABT)	0.95	0.95	0.95
Cognition-based Trust (CBT)	0.89	0.95	0.91
Distributive Justice (DJM)	0.96	0.97	0.96
Interactional Justice (IJM)	0.95	0.95	0.95
Procedural Justice (PJM)	0.96	0.96	0.96
Transformational Leadership (TFL)	0.96	0.97	0.96
Transactional Leadership (TRC)	0.80	0.90	0.84

As shown in the table above, upon the first iteration of reliability statistics, the Cronbach's alpha results for all latent constructs were found to be greater than 0.75, as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2011). The latent constructs with the highest Cronbach's alpha were distributive justice, procedural justice and transformational leadership, all with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.96. The latent construct with the lowest Cronbach's alpha was that of transactional leadership, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80, which was still within the acceptable range.

Given that the measures used for each of the latent constructs were self-reported, a single factor Harman's test was conducted to test for common method bias using SPSS (Schwarz *et al.*, 2017; Storm and Scheepers, 2019). The single factor Harman's test evaluates the percentage of total variance that can be explained by one of the indicator variables (Schwarz *et al.*, 2017). It is recommended that common method bias analysis be done for a PLS-SEM, which is another reason why the single factor Harman's test was selected for this research analysis (Schwarz *et al.*, 2017).

As shown in the table below, it was found that one of the factors explained 53.2% of the total variance. This finding indicated a threat of common method bias. In an effort to remove this bias, a number of indicator variables were removed and the test was redone in SPSS. The indicator variables removed were three from transformational leadership, three from interpersonal justice mechanisms and two from affect-based trust. Following this, the total variance explained by a single factor was 49.21%, which is less than the recommended 50% (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003; Schwarz *et al.*, 2017). It is important to note that this was not unexpected as the potential for common method bias is high for PLS-SEM analysis, given the high number of latent constructs typically used in such models as well as the potential overlap between these latent constructs (Kock, 2015). These indicator variables were also removed for the structural model done in SmartPLS 3, so as to not create false positives (type I errors) or false negatives (type II errors) (Kock, 2015).

Table 4: Second iteration single factor Harman's test

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	19.65	50.38	50.38	19.19	49.21	49.21
2	3.77	9.66	60.04			
3	2.59	6.65	66.69			
4	1.49	3.83	70.52			
5	1.13	2.91	73.43			
6	0.92	2.35	75.78			
7	0.83	2.13	77.90			
8	0.66	1.69	79.59			
9	0.63	1.60	81.19			
10	0.56	1.42	82.62			
11	0.53	1.35	83.97			
12	0.47	1.20	85.17			
13	0.43	1.09	86.26			
14	0.40	1.02	87.28			
15	0.37	0.95	88.23			
16	0.33	0.85	89.08			
17	0.32	0.83	89.91			
18	0.30	0.76	90.67			
19	0.27	0.70	91.37			
20	0.27	0.68	92.05			
21	0.26	0.67	92.72			
22	0.25	0.65	93.37			
23	0.24	0.62	93.99			
24	0.23	0.60	94.59			
25	0.20	0.52	95.11			
26	0.20	0.51	95.62			
27	0.19	0.48	96.10			
28	0.18	0.45	96.55			
29	0.16	0.42	96.97			
30	0.16	0.42	97.39			
31	0.15	0.39	97.78			
32	0.15	0.38	98.16			
33	0.14	0.36	98.52			
34	0.12	0.31	98.83			
35	0.11	0.28	99.11			
36	0.10	0.25	99.36			
37	0.09	0.23	99.59			
38	0.09	0.22	99.81			
39	0.07	0.19	100.00			

Extraction Method: Principle Axis Factoring

Each of the constructs was tested for normality. This was to check and confirm if a parametric test could be used to test the hypotheses or whether a non-parametric test would be needed because normality had been violated (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

SPSS was used again to evaluate the Shapiro-Wilk Sig value (Shapiro and Francia, 1972). This method of testing for a normal distribution was chosen because it is suitable for samples larger than 50 (Shapiro and Francia, 1972; Zhang *et al.*, 2016). Normality was checked for all latent constructs. The Shapiro-Wilk Sig value was $p < 0.05$, indicating that normality was violated (Shapiro and Francia, 1972; Zhang *et al.*, 2016). As a result, a non-parametric alternative, partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), was used for the statistical analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

The next test of the quality of the structural model was to evaluate the adjusted R^2 . As indicated earlier, values of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 would indicate substantial, moderate and weak indicative power of the exogenous variables to explain the variance for the respective endogenous variables (Hair *et al.*, 2011). As indicated in the table below, the exogenous variables had substantial indicative power to explain variance in affect-based trust, cognition-based trust and interactional justice, whereas they only had a moderate to weak indicative power to explain variance in distributive justice and procedural justice. Even this moderate to weak indicative power, however, was nevertheless found to be significant, with $p < 0.05$.

Table 5: Adjusted R^2 per latent construct

Adjusted R^2	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Affect-based Trust (ABT)	0.75	0.75	0.05	16.68	0
Cognition-based Trust (CBT)	0.78	0.78	0.05	16.60	0
Distributive Justice (DJM)	0.40	0.42	0.10	4.09	0
Interactional Justice (IJM)	0.82	0.82	0.04	22.86	0
Procedural Justice (PJM)	0.32	0.34	0.05	6.02	0

The next evaluation criterion used was that of Stone-Geisser's Q^2 . Q^2 is a measure of the model's predictive power outside of the selected sample (Hair *et al.*, 2011). The results for this were obtained by running the blindfolding algorithm in SmartPLS 3. Hair *et al.* (2011) recommend that the blindfolding procedure only be applied to endogenous variables, measured reflectively, and it was therefore suitable for this analysis. As can be seen in the table below, the Q^2 for all endogenous variables was greater than 0, indicating that the exogenous variables, transformational leadership and transactional leadership, have predictive power over the endogenous variables, distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, affect-based trust and cognition-based trust (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

Table 6: Stone-Geisser's Q^2

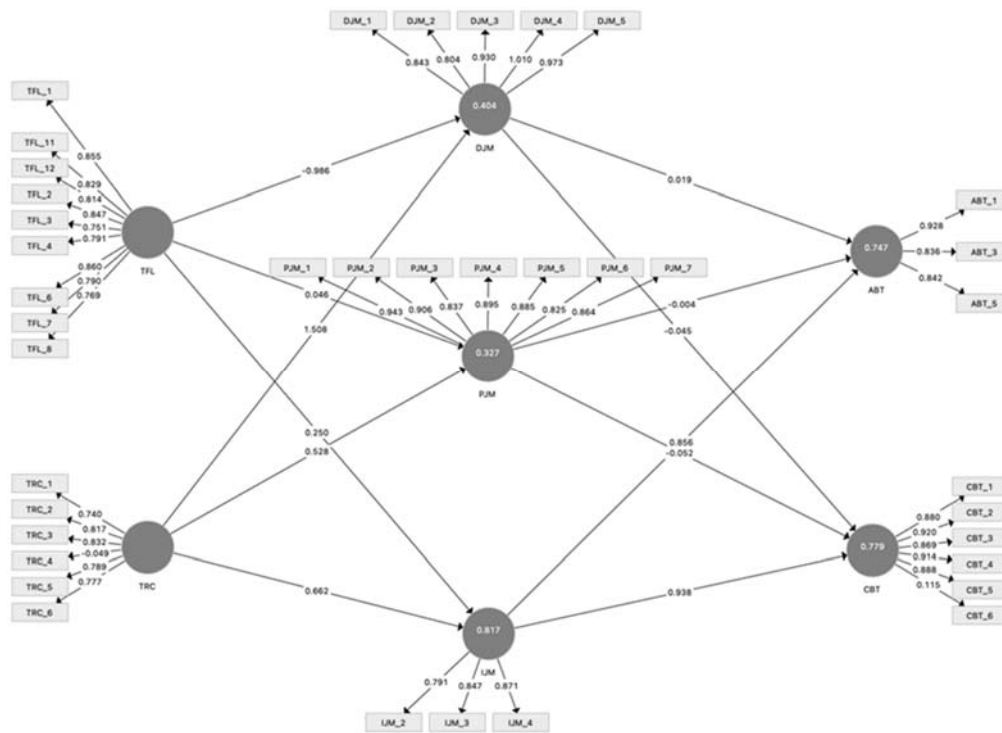
Q^2	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (= 1 - SSE/SSO)
Affect-based Trust (ABT)	1098	403.12	0.63
Cognition-based Trust (CBT)	2196	830.45	0.62
Distributive Justice (DJM)	1830	378.49	0.79
Interactional Justice (IJM)	1098	476.87	0.57
Procedural Justice (PJM)	2562	669.96	0.74

Given that the quality of both the measured constructs and structural model had been determined, the next phase of the analysis was to evaluate the respective path weights and their significance, to either reject, or fail to reject, the research hypotheses.

To model the effect that leadership behaviours have on organisational justice mechanisms and, in turn, on the components of trust, a structural model was built in SmartPLS 3.

The figure below shows a graphical representation of this structural model. Given that the indicators making up the respective constructs were measured reflectively, the consistent PLS algorithm was used for the path analysis (Dijkstra and Henseler, 2015; Shmueli *et al.*, 2019).

Figure 2: SmartPLS 3 output model



Using the consistent bootstrapping algorithm in SmartPLS 3, it was possible to evaluate the strength of both the total mediating effect as well as the specific mediating effects between the various latent constructs, as well as the significance of those effects (Dijkstra and Henseler, 2015; Shmueli *et al.*, 2019). The first analysis focused on the total mediating effects evaluated using the SmartPLS 3 output as shown in the table below. This analysis considers the total mediating effect of all the mediating variables, distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice.

Table 7: Total effects of mediating variables

Total Indirect Effects	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
TFL → ABT	0.195	0.153	0.248	0.787	0.431
TFL → CBT	0.276	0.248	0.241	1.145	0.252
TRC → ABT	0.594	0.638	0.248	2.396	0.017
TRC → CBT	0.526	0.557	0.239	2.202	0.028

As indicated in Table 7, there was a positive total mediating effect from both the independent variables, transformational leadership and transactional leadership, on the dependent variables of affect-based trust and cognition-based trust, as mediated by all the organisational justice mechanisms. Importantly, this was when the mediating effect of all mediating variables were combined, hence the “total indirect effect” reported in SmartPLS 3. All of these were significant except for the total mediating effect of transformational leadership on affect-based trust and cognition-based trust, as mediated by all the organisational justice mechanisms.

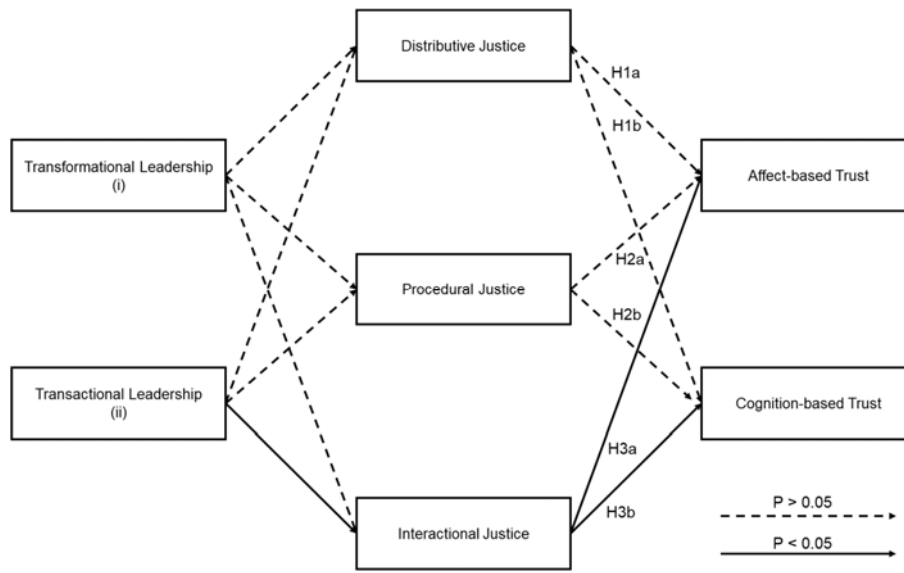
By delving deeper into specific mediating effects, as reported in SmartPLS 3 for individual mediating effects, however, it was found that only one organisational justice mechanism, had a significant mediating effect. This is represented in the table below.

Table 8: Specific effects of mediating variables

Specific Indirect Effects	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
TFL → DJM → ABT	-0.02	-0.03	0.06	0.29	0.77
TRC → DJM → ABT	0.03	0.04	0.09	0.33	0.74
TFL → IJM → ABT	0.21	0.18	0.24	0.90	0.37
TRC → IJM → ABT	0.57	0.60	0.24	2.36	0.02
TFL → PJM → ABT	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.99
TRC → PJM → ABT	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.05	0.96
TFL → DJM → CBT	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.69	0.49
TRC → DJM → CBT	-0.07	-0.07	0.09	0.79	0.43
TFL → IJM → CBT	0.23	0.20	0.26	0.90	0.37
TRC → IJM → CBT	0.62	0.66	0.27	2.34	0.02
TFL → PJM → CBT	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.08	0.93
TRC → PJM → CBT	-0.03	-0.03	0.04	0.68	0.50

As shown in the table above, the only mediating endogenous variable that had a significant mediating effect between the independent exogenous variable (transactional leadership) and the dependent endogenous variables (affect-based trust and cognition-based trust) was that of interactional justice. Neither of the other mediating endogenous variables (distributive justice and procedural justice) had a significant mediating effect. Figure 3 below illustrates a summary of the results by linking them back to the hypotheses.

Figure 3: Updated model capturing findings from the research



Distributive justice had no significant mediating effect between transformational (i) or transactional leadership (ii) and affect-based trust. Hypothesis 1a was therefore rejected. Distributive justice had no significant mediating effect between transformational (i) and transactional leadership (ii) and cognition-based trust, and hypothesis 1b was rejected. Procedural justice also had no significant mediating effect between transformational (i) and transactional leadership (ii) and affect-based trust. Hypothesis 2a was therefore also rejected. Procedural justice had no significant mediating effect between transformational (i) and transactional leadership (ii) and cognition-based trust, and hypothesis 2b was rejected.

Interactional justice had no significant mediating effect between transformational leadership (i) and affect-based trust, and hypothesis 3a(i) was therefore rejected. Interactional justice had no significant mediating effect between transformational leadership and cognition-based trust, and hypothesis 3b(i) was therefore also rejected. However, interactional justice had a significant mediating effect between transactional leadership (ii) and affect-based trust, offering support for hypothesis 3a(ii). Interactional justice had a significant mediating effect between transactional leadership (ii) and cognition-based trust, offering the evidence necessary to accept hypothesis 3b(ii).

Discussion

Most respondents (39%) belonged to the 31 – 40 age category while the next largest age group (37%) was the 41 to 50 years old category. Thus 76% of the sample was aged between 31 and 50. This distribution is fairly representative of the working population in SA (Stats SA, 2020).

Of the sample, 34.97% was female, 63.66% was male and 1.37% preferred not to share gender information. Recently published work indicates that this is also a fair representation of the general working population in SA (Adelekan and Bussin, 2018).

Most respondents (48.4%) were at junior and middle management levels within their organisations. It was found that 14% of the respondents had been with their respective organisations for 3 – 5 years, 27% for 5 – 10 years, 19% for 10 – 15 years and 12% for longer than 15 years. This indicated that a significant number of the respondents had worked for their respective organisations for enough time to build trust with their leaders as well as learn about relevant organisational procedures (McAllister, 1995).

It was expected that both distributive and procedural justice would have a positive mediating effect on both components of trust (affect-based trust and cognition-based trust). However, the results from the structural model tested in SmartPLS 3 did not support any of those hypotheses as no significant specific mediating effect was found between transformational and transactional leadership and the components of trust (cognition-based trust and affect-based trust) as mediated by distributive justice or procedural justice.

These findings can potentially be explained by the context within which this study was conducted. It took place while Covid-19 was significantly impacting the working behaviours of employees across organisations, with most people working from home with minimal face-to-face engagement. As a result, individuals may not have felt as much a part of their organisations as they might have before the pandemic, and trust may have been affected by other elements in the organisational justice mechanisms, such as interactional justice.

Interactional justice considers the fairness of the manner in which procedures are implemented, with the focus on the leader rather than on the organisation (Moorman, 1991). Interactional justice was added as an additional mediating organisational justice mechanism in order to extend Ng's (2017) work. Interactional justice was the only organisational justice mechanism to have a significant mediating effect between the exogenous latent construct of transactional leadership and the two endogenous latent constructs (cognition-based trust and affect-based trust), with $p < 0.05$.

Distributive and procedural justice are mainly focused on organisational level justice mechanisms, compared to the leader-focused interactional justice mechanism. Therefore, the findings show that transactional leadership and interactional justice play an overriding role in the trust between followers and their leaders within the extreme pandemic context of the current study. This is further supported by Martin *et al.* (2018) who found that a significant portion of leadership research is based on intra-person mediation models, hence the important role that leader-member exchange theory plays as part of the theoretical foundation of this study (Martin *et al.*, 2018). As explained in the literature review, leader-member exchange is important because of the exchange relationships between leaders and their followers.

Furthermore, the manner in which leaders implement procedures should be truthful and justified (Colquitt and Rodell, 2011; Colquitt and Zipay, 2015), which in turn are aligned to the characteristics of transactional leadership (contingent reward and management-by-exception). As the findings show, interactional justice plays a key role in facilitating the perception of organisational fairness as communicated by leaders to their followers.

These results may indicate that the attributes of transactional leadership (contingent reward and management-by-exception), together with the mediating effect of interactional justice, which focuses on the manner in which leaders communicate, are critical to build trust during times of extreme uncertainty, as experienced during Covid-19. These findings also suggest that the expectations of followers change if the context changes. They therefore provide guidance to leaders in organisations as to how to communicate with their followers during uncertain times.

The findings provide leaders with valuable insights into the effects of such extreme events and how leaders should adjust their styles to better support the formation of trust between themselves and followers.

Theoretical implications

This research extends Ng's (2017) work, showing that interactional justice is a critical component of organisational justice and demonstrating its impact on building trusting relationships between leaders and followers. It is therefore recommended that future research considers interactional justice along with distributive and procedural justice.

Another important implication is the role that spatial and temporal context plays in the relationship between leadership and trust. As noted earlier, even though Ng (2017) found that distributive and procedural justice had a positive mediating effect between transformational leadership and trust, this study—conducted in this unique context—provides new theoretical insights. The context of extreme conditions has a significant impact on relationships established in previous studies under normal conditions.

It was also found that, for this study, transformational leadership had no significant effect on cognition-based trust and affect-based trust, as mediated by distributive and procedural justice. This is in contrast to Ng's (2017) findings that transformational leadership had a positive effect on “trust in the organisation” and “trust in the leader”, as mediated by procedural justice. In addition to this, Ng (2017) also found that transformational leadership positively affected “trust in the organisation”, as mediated by distributive justice. It seems that the consistency of communication and clear rewards characteristic

of transactional leadership had a significant relationship in the current study, perhaps because of the uncertainty created by the extreme conditions.

Implications for management

It has long been evangelised that leadership plays a critical role in the success of organisations (Bass *et al.*, 1987; Osborn and Marion, 2009). The results from this study show that the manner in which leaders explain and communicate organisational justice mechanisms is of critical importance, not only to build affect-based trust, but also cognition-based trust, between leaders and their followers, especially during times of extreme uncertainty.

Therefore, given the context within which this research was conducted, the findings may indicate that the attributes of transactional leadership and interactional justice become more important. Furthermore, given this same context, they may also show that the manner in which expectations and rewards are communicated is critically important to build trust between leaders and followers, as illustrated by the positive mediating effect of interactional justice.

It is therefore clear that procedures and formal processes on their own are insufficient to support perceived organisational justice, especially during a time of extreme uncertainty. It is clear that it is the responsibility of leaders to communicate effectively and clearly to their followers at all times to build trust within the organisation, allowing employees to put themselves in positions of vulnerability, with the expectation that positive outcomes will be achieved. Leaders are therefore required to (i) show their followers that their needs as leaders come second to those of their followers, (ii) given the extreme context, act with kindness and consideration towards their followers, and, (iii) clearly communicate what is expected of their followers, by focusing on task orientation. Strong trust relationships will then develop between leaders and their followers.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The survey was completed at a specific point in time, and there could be a risk that participants' moods may have affected their responses. For example, a participant may have been reprimanded by his or her leader for work not done, which in turn could have influenced the perception of the leadership style exhibited at that point in time, as well as of organisational justice mechanisms. It may have been possible to mitigate this negative effect by performing a longitudinal study, but given the time constraints for the research, this was not feasible (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Such a longitudinal

study would also potentially mitigate some of the extreme effects of Covid-19 and the role it played in the perceptions of leadership, organisational justice mechanisms and trust in this study.

Given the potential impact that Covid-19 may have had on the findings, it would be beneficial to replicate this study at a future point in time when this may not have such a large impact.

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