

Supervisory Styles and Their Impact on Affective Commitment: A Gender-Based Comparison of Non-Managerial Employees in the Apparel Industry in Western Province, Sri Lanka

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The study explores the impact of supervisory styles on affective commitment among non-managerial employees in the Sri Lankan apparel industry. This research addresses a critical gap by focusing on the Sri Lankan apparel industry, which struggles with affective commitment level of non-managerial employees. Additionally, this study has especially focused on whether male and female non-managerial employees have perceived supervisory style at work differently. Data were collected from 257 non-managerial employees across three knitted export organizations in Sri Lanka using validated scales for affective commitment, and supervisory styles while getting abusive supervision, task-oriented supervision and supportive supervision as dimensions of supervisory styles. Random sampling technique was adopted for the study. The methodological approach involved quantitative analysis to test the hypothesized relationships, utilizing principles from social exchange theory, particularly emphasizing exchange ideology. Statistical techniques, including regression analysis, and independent sample T-test were used to determine the impact of supervisory style on affective commitment. The findings highlight the critical need for organizations to address supervisory behaviour and foster positive social exchange to enhance employee commitment. In addition, gender alone is not sufficient to explain perception of supervisory styles. Therefore, the study also did not include other variables that may influence the difference in the perception of supervisory style.

Key words: *Affective commitment, Gender differences, Supervisory styles.*

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Introduction

A committed and dedicated workforce is essential for the organization's success and the fulfilment of its mission (Arimie, 2019). Therefore, building a solid bond and sense of belonging among employees and the organization is crucial for long-term success (Harter et al., 2003). Employees who have a strong emotional attachment (affective commitment) to their organisation are less likely to leave (Meyer et al., 2002). Previous research has extensively examined the significant outcomes associated with varying levels of Affective Commitment within organizational contexts. When employees have a strong Affective Commitment, they tend to engage in behaviours such as providing assistance to colleagues, dedicating additional time and effort, sharing valuable information, and receiving positive evaluations from their managers (Mercurio, 2015). Therefore, the study of Affective Commitment provides valuable insights into how organizations can create an environment where employees feel connected, motivated, and dedicated to the organization's goals and objectives.

Supervisors play a pivotal role in fulfilling the psychological contract between the organization and its employees, as well as empowering them (Kidron, 2018). A substantial body of literature has been dedicated to investigating the dynamics of manager-employee interactions, with a particular focus on either positive or negative styles (Trisakhon & Jermstiparsert, 2019; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010; Chu, 2014; Khan et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2022). In order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate details within these relationships, it is beneficial for the researcher to consider both positive and negative styles Su et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2020; Liao et al., 2020).

However, a significant empirical research gap exists in understanding this relationship within the distinct context of non-managerial employees further.

The present study aims to examine the impact of supervisory styles (supportive, abusive and task- oriented) on Affective Commitment, and by exploring the relationships, this research seeks to enhance the understanding of the complex dynamics between supervisors and employees. The existing body of literature has examined the impact of leadership styles on a range of outcomes across various industries in Sri Lanka, including the software industry, banking sector, and public sector organizations (Raveendran, 2022; Wijesinghe, 2021; Rathi & Lee, 2017; Agarwala et al., 2014; Ali et al., 2020; Aryee et al., 2008). However, there remains a lack of research specifically investigating supervisory styles and their influence on Affective Commitment within the context of Sri Lankan apparel organizations.

Supervisors in the apparel industry play a significant role in fostering Affective Commitment and enhancing the overall performance and well-being of non-managerial employees. Research has consistently highlighted the critical role supervisors play in influencing job satisfaction, engagement, and organizational Commitment among employees in the apparel sector (Gnanayudam & Dharmasiri, 2007; Kiron, 2021; Jayasinghe, & Thavakumar, 2020). A supervisor's role in the apparel industry is to maintain quality and productivity, manage and motivate, and produce the right product. Studies conducted within the industry in Sri Lanka have emphasized the positive impact of supervisors' intrinsic and extrinsic rewards on the job satisfaction of non-managerial employees (Sankalpana & Jayasekara, 2017). Supervisor support has also been identified as a crucial job resource that significantly affects employee engagement in the apparel manufacturing industry (Thisera & Wijesundara, 2020). Wong and Wong, (2013) highlighted the importance of positive supervisor-employee relationships in fostering Commitment and loyalty. Considering the significant impact of supervisory styles on employee Affective

Commitment and the overall performance of employees, it is important to delve further into understanding how different supervisory styles influence Affective Commitment in the apparel industry. However, a significant empirical research gap exists in understanding this relationship within the distinct context of non-managerial employees operating in the apparel industry in the Western Province of Sri Lanka (Ranasinghe & Amarawansah, 2019; Raveendran, 2022; Wijesinghe, 2021; Agarwala et al., 2014; Ali et al., 2020; Aryee et al., 2008). Thus, the researchers intend to investigate the impact of supervisory styles, including supportive, task-oriented, and Abusive supervision, on Affective Commitment among non-managerial employees in the apparel sector.

But importantly, the individual characteristics of both the supervisor and supervisee (employee), including their gender, are key components that influence the nature and quality of the relationship (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004; Brock & Sibbald, 1988; Wetchler et al., 1989). From a review of the literature with respect to the gender of the supervisee, it influences to shapes one's beliefs, stereotypes, and behavioural expectations (Gilbert & Rossman, 1992). Hence, the supervisory relationship can be thought of as gender-sensitive and guided by a supervisor's and a supervisee's views and biases, but it is not yet conclusive (Hindes & Andrews, 2011). Therefore, the researchers examine how male and female non-managerial employees have perceived the supervisory styles that lead to their affective commitment to the organization.

Thus, based on the above identified gaps and the problem justification, the following problem statement of the study has been developed. The main research issue of this study is "Whether supervisory styles impact on non-managerial employees' Affective Commitment in selected apparel organizations in the

western province, Sri Lanka and to what extent does that association vary by gender”

Research Questions

Based on the main aspects of the research problem, the following two research questions are derived.

1. What is the impact of supervisory styles on the Affective Commitment of non-managerial employees in the apparel industry?
2. What extent does the impact of supervisory styles on affective commitment vary by gender among non-executive employees?

The objective of this study was to investigate the Affective Commitment and perceived supervisor styles using the theoretical framework of social-exchange theory. Therefore, this study holds potential importance and worth for organizations, practitioners, and scholars. Previous studies have primarily examined supervisory styles in various industries, but there is a lack of research specifically targeting the apparel sector (Manage & Dissanayake, 2021; Welmilla, 2020; Wijesinghe, 2021; Sumanasiri, 2020). By filling this gap, the study enhances the knowledge of supervisory styles and their implications in the apparel industry.

Literature Review

Supervisory Styles

The concept of supervisory styles pertains to the various methodologies and tactics employed by supervisors in the execution of their supervisory responsibilities and interactions with their subordinates (Holloway and Wolleat, 1981 as cited in Li et al., 2021). Therefore, Supervisory styles refer to

the diverse ways in which supervisors manage their teams and interact with their employees while carrying out their responsibilities. It's all about the methods and strategies they use to lead, guide, and communicate with their subordinates. Each supervisor may have their unique approach, and these styles can vary widely depending on the supervisor's personality, experience, and the specific needs of the team or situation they're dealing with. In essence, it's about how supervisors put their leadership into action, making sure their team performs well and operates smoothly (Holloway and Wolleat, 1981 as cited in Li et al., 2021). Supervision can be one of the strategies to enable employees to achieve the goal (Hoque et al., 2020). The concept of supervisory styles encompasses a range of behavioural patterns demonstrated by supervisors when establishing a professional relationship with their supervisees (Hunt, 1971). Which means that the idea of supervisory styles involves the various ways supervisors behave when building professional relationships with their subordinates. It's all about the patterns of behavior they exhibit while working with and guiding their supervisees. These styles can include how they communicate, provide guidance, offer support, and make decisions. Essentially, it's about the unique approaches and methods supervisors use to create effective working relationships and lead their teams toward success.

The identification of the most effective supervisory style is contingent upon the consideration of various contributing factors. There exists a range of attributes that are commonly linked to effective leadership. These attributes encompass intelligence, self-assurance, ethical conduct, adaptability, ingenuity, vigor, and sincerity (Guo et al., 2021). Antonakis (2003) claimed that the efficacy of supervisory style is notably impacted by the degree of emotional intelligence. According to Brown (2014), the establishment of an emotional connection between a leader and their subordinates is proposed to be a more dependable

indicator of good executive leadership in comparison to the conventional assessment of general intelligence. The supervisory style employed by leaders may be influenced by the organizational culture, which in turn can have an impact on how their effectiveness is perceived (Schimmoeller, 2010).

The concept of supervisory style, as expounded upon by Hartmann et al. (2010), encompasses a composite of two fundamental dimensions, namely the style dimension and the measures dimension. The style dimension refers to the specific leadership style adopted by a manager, while the measures dimension pertains to the performance measurement employed by their organization. The style dimension is a leadership style, as identified by the Ohio State Leadership Studies (Bass, 1990). Similarly, supervisors' styles can be categorized into two main forms: task-oriented and employee-oriented. However, the employees' perceptions of these styles and the specific behaviours expected from supervisors can vary (Tayeb, 1995). Thus, the perception of supervisory styles by employees may differ from the actual styles exhibited by supervisors. Thus, the present study aims to investigate supervisory styles such as supportive, Task-Oriented and Abusive styles on Affective Commitment in non-managerial employees in the apparel industry in the western province of Sri Lanka.

Affective Commitment

Affective Commitment refers to the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991, P.67). which means Affective Commitment describes the deep emotional connection an employee has with their organization. It involves a strong sense of belonging, a feeling of being closely connected to the company, and an active involvement and investment in its well-being.

The construct of Affective Commitment, as initially proposed by Kanter (1968), is grounded in the theoretical underpinnings of social cohesion and attachment. This study examines the concept of Commitment, specifically focusing on the emotional investment and sense of belongingness experienced by individuals. The research explores how individuals demonstrate their Commitment by actively integrating themselves within a collective entity.

Affective Commitment can be fostered through a range of factors, as explored in previous research (Morrow, 2011). The existing literature extensively supports the notion that demographic variables, individual differences, work experiences, and investments are significant factors contributing to Affective Commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Pierce and Dunham (1987) conducted a study aimed at identifying a pre-entry individual difference that could serve as a predictor for Affective organizational Commitment. In addition, previous studies have identified several pre-entry factors that have a significant impact on Affective Commitment. Notably, Stumpf and Hartman (1984) and Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) have examined the influence of career exploration, pre-entry knowledge, and proactive personality on Affective Commitment.

According to Solinger et al. (2008), Affective Commitment is strongly correlated with several significant workplace outcomes, including performance, organizational citizenship behaviours, and a number of withdrawal behaviours, including absenteeism, intention to leave, and actual turnover (Meyer et al., 2002). Furthermore, Affective Commitment is closely tied to various behavioral aspects in the workplace.

The Relationship between Supervisory Styles and Affective Commitment

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated a positive association between supervision styles and organizational Commitment across diverse contexts. In this study, the phenomenon of Affective Commitment is commonly explained through the utilization of the theoretical framework of social exchange theory and the construct of reciprocity (Rhoades et al., 2001). The observation of perceived benefits obtained by employees from their organization produces a corresponding increase in their level of commitment. According to Radstaak and Hennes (2017), supervisors who possess the ability to establish strong interpersonal connections with their subordinates, characterized by trust, respect, and loyalty, can effectively cultivate a positive and gratifying work-related mindset among employees. This is primarily attributed to the fact that such supervisors are more inclined to actively create a stimulating and supportive work milieu, thereby encouraging employees to engage in proactive behaviours and utilize available resources effectively. According to a study conducted by Kidd and Smewing (2001), there exists a positive relationship between employees' perception of trust and authority granted by their supervisors and their level of organizational Commitment.

In order to effectively meet the evolving needs of supervisees and accommodate their individual characteristics, various styles of supervision have been identified and implemented (Saleem & Rana, 2020). The supervisory style employed by leaders has distinct characteristics and can significantly impact employees' perceptions and behaviours within an organization. In a study conducted by Hartmann et al. (2010), it was discovered that there exists empirical evidence supporting the notion that specific combinations of supervisory styles have the potential to fluctuate in accordance with the levels of goal clarity and evaluation

fairness. Supervisors contribute to fulfilling this contract by fostering a positive work environment, providing guidance and support to their subordinates, and ensuring a fair and equitable treatment of employees (Friedlander & Ward, 1984). In addition, it has been observed that supervisors have a significant impact on the emotional state of workers (Pohl & Galletta, 2016). Moreover, Yiing and Ahmad (2009)., Lapointe and Vandenberghe (2017), have conducted empirical research to examine the relationship between supervisor behaviours and organizational Commitment. Their findings provided evidence supporting a positive association between these two variables.

The Relationship between Employees Gender and supervisory styles and Affective Commitment

Gender serves as a pervasive organizer within cultures, shaping beliefs, stereotypes, and behavioral expectations (Gilbert & Rossman, 1992). Research indicates that female employees often prefer supervisors who exhibit considerate and nurturing behaviors, reflecting traditional gender norms (Vecchio & Boatwright, 2002). Conversely, male employees tend to value supervisors who emphasize structure and task-orientation. This contradiction presents organizational challenges, as supervisors must adapt their styles to meet the diverse preferences of their team members (Vecchio & Boatwright, 2002). Furthermore, Long et al. (1996) highlight significant gender-related differences in the perception of supervisory styles among non-managerial employees, particularly noted by female supervisees. Female supervisees perceive both male and female supervisors as more self-disclosing compared to their male counterparts, a finding attributed to gender stereotypes and role expectations. Women are often perceived as communal and nurturing, while men are viewed as agentic and dominant. Employees tend to respond more positively to

supervisors whose styles align with these gender-based expectations (Sargent et al., 2022).

Literature found that the gender-specific preferences for job attributes can influence how individuals perceive their commitment to the organization. According to Adamchik and Sedlak, (2024). Men tend to prioritize job attributes traditionally associated with masculinity, such as earnings, autonomy, and promotion opportunities. Male employees, who typically value these attributes more, feel more committed emotionally (Adamchik & Sedlak, 2024). Women, on the other hand, place higher value on job attributes traditionally associated with femininity, such as good interpersonal relationships, favorable work conditions, and intrinsically enjoyable and meaningful work. Therefore, female employees feel more committed if the organization emphasizes feminine attributes (Konrad et al., 2000). Some studies have found that women tend to have higher levels of affective commitment compared to men, even after controlling for other factors (Adamchik & Sedlak, 2024; Aydin, Sarier & Uysal, 2011). On the other hand, another study in Turkey also found that the gender of the employee did not influence affective commitment (Demir & Elci, 2023).

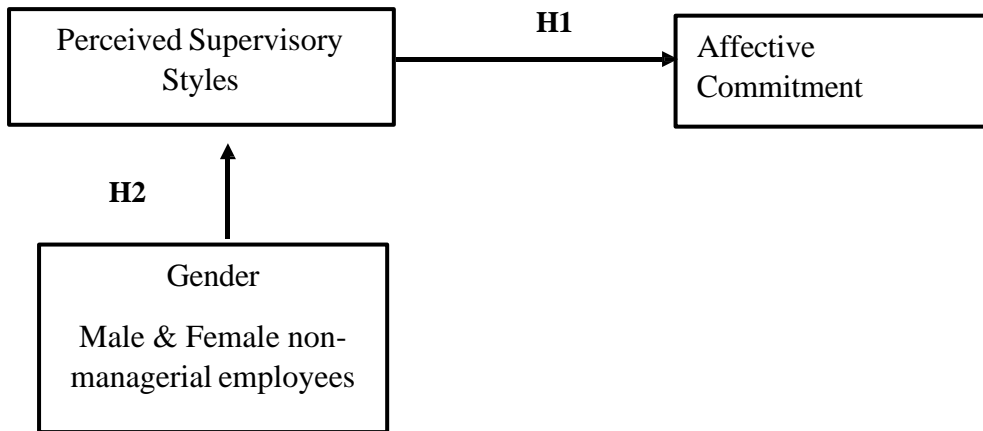
Based on the aforementioned evidence, the authors formulated three hypotheses as follows:

H1: There is an impact of supervisory styles on Affective Commitment of non-managerial employees.

H2: There is a significant difference in the perception of supervisory styles between male and female non-managerial employees

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Source: Authors developed (2024)

Methods

The unit of analysis of this study was individual non-managerial employee within the selected organizations. Primary data is gathered directly from the original source and a survey questionnaire is used to collect primary data. The target population focuses on non-managerial employees of three selected knitted export organizations and a total of 257 non-managerial employees were randomly selected from the targeted apparel firms. The applied sampling technique was a simple random sampling method. SPSS version 25 was used to analysis the data.

By analyzing the data, the researchers have found some demographic features which really explore the background of the respondents. When considering gender, it is notable that the workforce is predominantly female, with 63.4% being women, while men constitute 36.6%. In terms of age, the largest age group falls within the 26-35 category, representing 35.0% of the respondents, followed by the 36-45 age group at 31.1%. Younger employees below 25 account for 16.7% of the total, while those aged 46-55 and 56 and above make up 10.9% and 6.2%, respectively. Marital status reveals a relatively balanced distribution, with 53.7% of employees being married and 46.3% unmarried. In the context of work departments, cutting is the most prominent department, with 24.1% of respondents, followed by Sawing at 23.7%, Finish Good at 19.5%, Quality at 18.7%, and Store at 14.0%. Finally, when examining experience, it is apparent that the workforce has a balanced distribution of experience levels. The largest group, 26.8%, has 6-10 years of experience, closely followed by those with 16-20 years at 22.6%. Smaller percentages are observed for employees with below five years of experience (21.8%), 11-15 years (16.0%), and above 20 years (12.8%).

Scales and variables

In the present study, conducted within the apparel industry, the authors have employed the definition of Affective Commitment as posited by Meyer and Allen (1991) to operationalize it. Thereby working definition of Affective Commitment to scale the variable was “employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization” (Meyer & Allen, 1991, P.67). The revised version of the Affective Commitment Scale developed by Meyer and Allen (2004) was used to measure affective commitment towards their organization.

The authors have working definition of supervisory style by drawing upon the works of Hunt (1971) and Boyd (1978), among other definitions available in the literature. Thereby working definition for supervisory styles in this study was “The various methods, behaviors, and strategies used by supervisors in their everyday interaction with employees are referred to as supervisory styles”. Measurement items of supervisory styles were taken from Friedlander and Ward (1984), and Tepper (2000). Gender of the respondents was considered by biological form of gender as male and female.

Measurement validation

Internal consistency was ensured using Cronbach’s α to measure the reliability coefficient of Supervisory styles (0.843), and Affective commitment (0.849). Composite Reliability value of affective commitment is above 0.842. the AVE of Affective Commitment is 0.474, which is slightly below the desired threshold of 0.5. However, it is worth noting that Affective Commitment standardized factor loadings exceed 0.5 and the CR value of Affective Commitment is above 0.7. Therefore, it can be seen that the Affective Commitment construct does possess convergent validity (Cheung et al., 2023). Moreover, the square root of the AVE (off-diagonal) exceeds the correlation between the constructs in the corresponding rows and columns. Therefore, the present study supports the acceptance of discriminant validity as well.

Findings of the study

H1: There is an impact of supervisory styles on Affective Commitment of non-managerial employees.

Table 1

Linear Regression of Supervisory Styles on Affective Commitment

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.
	B	Std. Error					
(Constant)	4.905	.355					.000
Supervisory Style	-.516	.109	.284 ^a	.081	.077	22.407	.000

Source: Survey data

The adjusted R square (R²) of this model is 0.077 With R² = 0.081 that means that model explains 7.7% of the variation in Affective Commitment, which is a relatively small portion. The significant coefficients beta value is -.516 with p value 0.000 < 0.05, the results revealed a significant negative relationship between supervisory styles and employees' Affective Commitment. The regression equation is presented as Affective Commitment = 4.905 - (0.516 Supervisory Styles). This formula shows that for each one-unit increase in Supervisory Styles, Affective Commitment is expected to decrease by an average of 0.516 units. This finding suggests that certain supervisory styles contribute to a decrease in non-managerial apparel employees' emotional attachment to their organization. Based on this H1 Accepted.

The apparel industry in Sri Lanka, as highlighted by the Sri Lanka Export Development Board (2021;2022), operates within a high-pressure environment driven by the demand for Sri Lankan-made apparel. This environment can foster

work conditions characterized by extreme pressure. When non managerial employees work in high-pressure environments with tight production schedules, that exacerbate stress levels and that further contribute to declining affective commitment. To reduce the impact, the organisations can conduct a thorough review of production targets to ensure they are realistic and achievable by involve employees in the goal-setting process without compromising employee well-being.

H2: There is a significant difference in the perception of supervisory styles between male and female non-managerial employees.

Table 2

Gender based comparison of the perception of Supervisory Styles

Description	Male (N = 94)		Female (N =163)		Equal variance assumed t (95)	Sig (2-tailed)
	M	SD	M	SD		
Supervisory Styles	3.2969	.47227	3.1743	.49525	1.944	.053

Source: Survey data

An Independent Samples t-test was conducted to compare the perception of supervisory styles between male (M = 3.296, SD = 0.47) and female (M = 3.174, SD = 0.49) groups. The assumption of equal variances was tested using Levene's Test, which indicated no significant difference in variances between the groups. The t-test results, assuming equal variances, showed no significant difference in the perception of supervisory styles between male and female groups ($t(95) = 1.944, p = 0.053$). Therefore, there is insufficient evidence at the 5% level of significance to conclude that there is a difference in the perception of supervisory

styles between male and female non managerial employees in the selected apparel organisations. Based on this H2 is not accepted.

In the context of the Sri Lankan apparel industry, “production targets can escalate to 200-250 pieces every thirty minutes” (Global Labor Justice, 2023, p.18). Supervisors in this industry face immense pressure to ensure maximum productivity from their teams. Despite this pressure, the statistical analysis indicates that both male and female non managerial employees perceive supervisory styles similarly. This lack of difference in perception may be due to the uniformly high pressure experienced by all employees, regardless of gender. The Sri Lankan apparel industry has implemented aggressive strategies to survive and recover from the COVID-19 epidemic and economic downturn, often at the expense of employee well-being and engagement (Manjaree & Shakyara, 2023). These strategies, including cost-cutting measures such as reducing wages, increasing workload, and enforcing inflexible production targets, create a work environment where supervisory styles perceived uniformly due to the consistent stressors faced by all employees.

Discussion and Recommendations

Managerial implications

Based on the findings of the study, there are several managerial implications worth considering. Firstly, the significant negative impact of supervisory styles on non-managerial employees' affective commitment underscores the importance of supervisors adopting more supportive approaches rather than poses of task-oriented or abusive supervisory styles at work. The Management of apparel organisation must walk the talk and lead the way, knowing the negative effects of uncomfortable behaviours of supervisors. Therefore,

organizations in the Sri Lankan apparel sector should invest in training programs for supervisors to enhance their leadership skills and promote a positive work environment (Kidd & Smewing, 2001; Radstaak & Hennes, 2017). Further, management needs to recognize that supervision is part of an ongoing exchange of information that can be perceived differently by employees. As with any type of communication in conflict resolution, both sides need to consider their roles and work to repair the relationship. More significantly, Supervisors should not only be interested in finding faults in employees, but more importantly, dialogue with employees to identify their strengths, weaknesses, desires, both personal and educational background which can be helpful to improve their job knowledge, skills and experiences. Also, management should create a work environment that is conducive to guarantee organizational co-existence which facilitates employees' responsiveness to supervision and thereby improving their affective commitment towards the organization. Additionally, gender did not significantly influence the perception of supervisory styles, suggesting a uniformity in how male and female employees perceive their supervisors' behaviors, at least in this study. As dissimilar employees often suffer from social exclusion. Because supervisors often prefer interactions with similar employees and exclude dissimilar employees from interpersonal interactions and networks. (Seong et al., 2015., Adamovic et al, 2023). Therefore, gender should not be a serious matter in recruitment in Sri Lanka apparel industry. However, this finding should prompt organizations to ensure that supervisory practices are equitable and supportive across all employees, regardless of gender.

Limitations

The results of this study were based on self-reports and from the perspectives of the non-managerial employees of the selected only apparel organization in the western province Sri Lanka. And the study relied solely on self-reported data

from non-managerial employees, which means it focused on perceptions rather than direct observations of supervisor behavior. This approach can introduce biases, such as respondents feeling inclined to agree with positive statements or consistently rating supervisors highly or lowly. Additionally, since many participants rated different supervisory style, there could be overlap in their responses, potentially affecting the data's independence and the study's overall findings. In addition, gender alone is not sufficient to explain perception of supervisory styles. Therefore, the study also did not include other variables that may influence the difference in the perception of supervisory style.

Conclusion

These results highlight the important role that supervisors play in shaping affective commitment. The findings revealed that supervisor style has a negative impact on affective commitment, highlighting the importance of supportive, abusive and task-oriented approaches in fostering employees' attachment to the organization. However, there was no significant differences between male and female employees' perceptions of supervisor style, and consistent perceptions were found across gender in the situations studied.

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