



# How transformational leadership, psychological contract violation, empowerment and affective commitment influence employee's intention to quit an organisation



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**Purpose:** The first aim of this article is to assess the influence of transformational leadership and some selected psychological constructs on employee's intention to quit an organisation. The second aim is to develop and validate a conceptual model that depicts the linear relationships amongst the constructs of this study (i.e. transformational leadership, psychological contract violation, psychological empowerment, affective commitment and intention to quit).

**Design/methodology/approach:** The article employs correlational research method using quantitative research strategy. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was adopted in analysing data collected from 232 conveniently sampled respondents from various organisations in South Africa. The partial least square based SEM methodology was used to test the relationships amongst the various constructs of the study.

**Findings/results:** Transformational leadership showed indirect influence on intention to quit through psychological contract violation, psychological empowerment and affective organisational commitment.

**Practical implications:** The conceptual model of this study provides a useful psychological framework that guide organisations in the formulation and implementation of retention policies and practices. Further, it is imperative for organisations to encourage the adoption of transformational leadership at all levels of management. This is in consideration of the significant influences that this leadership behaviour exerts on individual employee's intention to quit an organisation.

**Originality/value:** An extensive search of instant literature did not produce evidence of an existing literature regarding the relationship between transformational leadership and psychological contract violation as we found in this article. This is a theoretical contribution to the field of organisation psychology. Furthermore, the article developed a unique and a empirically validated model that explained the direction and strength of relationships amongst selected antecedents of intention to quit. This practical contribution provides managers with both pragmatic insights and theoretical framework in formulating an effective retention strategy for their organisations.

**Keywords:** turnover intention; transformational leadership; selected psychological constructs; organisation employee empowerment; affective organisational; commitment; structural equation modeling.

## Introduction

The nature of relationship amongst organisational members, their leadership and employee turnover, or the turnover intention, has gained sustained traction in management literature, over time (Butali, Wesang'ula, & Mamuli, 2013; Joo & Park, 2010; Yin-Fah, Foon, Chee-Leong, & Osman, 2010). The pull for a better understanding of these organisational phenomena in contemporary management theory, and indeed, practice has resulted from collapse of the hitherto ubiquitous labour market into a globalised space. Therefore, one of the unintended consequences of this development is the acceleration of persistent problem of high rate of employee turnover in organisations across the world. Some organisational psychology scholars, such as Picoult (2010) suggested that the intention to quit (ITQ) amongst frustrated employees portend a more damaging effect, both to the organisation and individuals, than manifestation of the actual turnover. It is essential therefore, that organisations consider a proactive mechanism through which elements that could potentially activate turnover intentions in both individual

employees and teams are identified (Carmeli, Gilat, & Weisberg, 2006).

The purpose of the present article is to contribute to current research on the antecedents of ITQ an organisation. A major predictor that may have a strong impact on intention to leave is that of organisational commitment (Kuean, Kaur, & Wong, 2010; Perryer, Jordan, Firms, & Travaglione, 2010; Ugboro, 2006). Employees who are loyal and committed to their organisations will probability exhibit a low propensity to leave the organisation.

Research has regularly demonstrated that when employees feel empowered at work, it is associated with stronger job performance, job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation (Chegini & Kheradmand, 2013; Jafari, Ali Moradi, & Ahanchi, 2013; Joo & Shim, 2010). Psychological empowerment is defined within the four cognitive dimensions of: meaning, competence, self-determination (autonomy) and impact (influence) (Spreitzer, Janaz, & Quinn, 1999). It is expected that these dimensions can arouse a sense of organisational commitment in employees.

As transformational leadership promotes an ethical climate in organisations (Engelbrecht, Van Aswegan, & Theron, 2005) as well as mentoring and supporting employee development, it is proposed that transformational leadership will increase the psychological empowerment of employees (Allameh, Heydarib, & Davoodic, 2012; Avey, Hughes, Norman, & Luthans 2008; Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden, & Hu, 2014). Lee, Willis and Tian (2018) argued that leader's empowering effects arise from two distinct psychological processes. Firstly, employees are more likely to experience empowered at work – they feel a greater sense of autonomy or control in their work, if they feel that their job has meaning and it aligns with their values, that they are competent in their abilities (i.e. self-efficacy) and that they can make a difference. Secondly, employees are more likely to trust leaders who they perceive as empowering. Followers may view greater autonomy or shared decision-making as an indication that the leader trusts them and is providing them with opportunities for self-development and growth.

The psychological contract includes not only promises but also expectations with which the parties provide mutual benefits (Ali, Haq, Ramay, & Azeem, 2010; Tomprou, Rousseau, & Hansen, 2015). As perceived violations of the psychological contract is an intense emotional experience, eliciting feelings of anger and betrayal and seriously eroding employee trust (Morrison & Robinson, 1997), it will most probably activate employees' intention to leave an organisation that does not keep its promises (Chen, Tsut, & Zhong, 2008; Shahnawaz & Goswami, 2011; Suazo, Turnley, & Mai-Dalton, 2005). Psychological contract violation is thus another important variable that could have an explanatory value for turnover intention and has not received sufficient attention by previous research.

Transformational leaders consciously provide followers with direction, support and create opportunities for

employee development (Ngodo, 2008; Rowold & Heinitz, 2007; Yukl, 2013).

Managers who exhibit transformational leadership behaviour will likely create a work climate that endorses the psychological contract between employees and the organisation (Grimmer & Oddy, 2007; Jafri, 2016; Rousseau, 2011). As trustworthy and ethical role models, transformational leaders will have an adverse effect on employees' perception of violation of their psychological contract.

Overall, we propose that transformational leadership is likely to have indirect effects on ITQ through diminishing perceptions of psychological contract violation and by enhancing the psychological empowerment and organisational commitment of employees.

The main contribution of the study to theory building is grounded on the unique combination of the selected antecedents of intention to leave an organisation. Furthermore, this is probably the first study to explore the key role of the influence of transformational leadership on the violation of the psychological contract between employers and employees, and the consequent implications for turnover intentions of employees.

## Conceptual framework

This study was conceptualised within the broad precinct provided by the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), which postulated that behavioural intentions are known to be the best predictor of a future behaviour or action (e.g. turnover) (Nadiri & Tanova, 2010). Very often, however, the reasons for these behavioural intentions mostly remain unclear (Firth, Mellor, Moore, & Loquet, 2004), largely because of to the nature of psychological processes that are involved when individuals decide to leave an organisation (Van Dick, Christ, Stellmacher, Wagner, Ahlswede, & Grubba, 2004). However, the social exchange theory (SET) provided a theoretical framework that guided the articulation of relationships between the constructs of this study.

Notwithstanding the emergence of divergent views on SET, the consensus remains that social exchange is predicated on a sequence of interactions that booster reciprocal obligations between parties, with each party depending on the benevolence of the other (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Emerson, 1976; Saks, 2006). The underlining principle of SET is that, overtime, relationship between parties developed into the level of mutual trust and commitment, which is guided by the rule of reciprocity and repayment. In other words, an action initiated by one party is expected to attract a complimentary repayment by the other party. The fundamental characteristics of social exchange therefore revolve around interdependence, reciprocity and mutual agreements (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Molm, 1994; Saks, 2006). For practical purposes, employees reciprocate a good deed (e.g. good leadership, empowerment) by the employer with a number of favourable work outcomes such as commitment and loyalty (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2006).

Transformational leadership construct has been well-defined mostly within the framework of its characteristics to motivate its followership to perform exceptionally well. This leadership genre strongly emphasises the essence and values of organisational goals and communication of the collective vision that inspire followers to elevate the good of the organisation above their personal and individual interests (Bass, 1985). Transformational leadership employs the strategy of creating emotional attachment between the leader and their followers, in order to influence the followers' values, aspirations and considerations (Antonakis & House, 2002). The implication of this strategy is that followers develop feelings of association with both the leader and the organisation (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003).

Management literature in general defines transformational leadership within the framework of the leader's behaviours and influence on followers on the one hand and in terms of its fundamental dimensions (i.e. idealised influence, individualised consideration, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation) (Hughes, Avey, & Nixon, 2010) on the other. Empirical studies have presented evidence establishing the potentiality of effective transformational leadership practices in reducing followers' ITQ (Samuel, 2017). This outcome is achieved by demonstrating existence of a fundamental agreement between 'the goals and values of the group, follower, leader and organisation' (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 36). Similarly, it is most likely that followers who believe that their personal needs are being met through a leader's individualised attention and consideration will want to remain with the leader and exhibit less intention to withdraw their membership of the organisation. The general qualities and effect of transformational leadership on both its followership and the organisation has made this leadership genre to remain, until this day, the most researched in the broad field of management and organisational psychology (Day & Antonakis, 2013).

## Theoretical framework and hypotheses development

Based on the review of extant literature, five hypotheses were formulated in order to evaluate the linear relationships that we predicted between the constructs of the study. Whilst the first two hypotheses (i.e. affective organisational commitment and psychological contract violation) were formulated to test direct effects on ITQ, the remaining three evaluated the indirect influence that transformational leadership exert on ITQ through psychological contract violation, psychological empowerment, and affective organisational commitment (see Figure 1).

### Affective organisational commitment and intention to quit

The concept of organisational commitment has been generally accepted in management theory as a defining factor in the employment relationship. Scholars have variously agreed on the need for organisations to strengthen the nexus of employee

commitment for an effective reduction in the rate of voluntary turnover (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday, 1998; Sulliman & Isles, 2000; Zangaro, 2001). Affective commitment is an expression of the level of emotional attachment that an employee displays towards an organisation. This includes the willingness to identify with, continue membership of and alignment with the value propositions of the organisation (Ugboro, 2006). Thus, continued membership of the organisation is a deliberate, voluntary and emotionally induced action, rather than a compelling consideration. Employee commitment should therefore be a natural stimulant that induces an individual's attachment to the organisation. This attachment also enhances an employee's voluntary membership and willingness to expend a considerable amount of energy that is directed at achieving organisational goals (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 1999; Raju & Srivastara, 1994). Amongst the three dimensions of organisational commitment construct that is identified in theory (i.e. continuance, normative and affective), we limited our study only to the affective dimension. This dimension is widely researched, perhaps because of its emotional appeal to individual employees. Further to its emotional attributes, Kuean et al. (2010) identified affective commitment as the strongest predictor of ITQ, to the extent that employees who are high on emotional attachment will be less likely to consider leaving the organisation. Based on SET (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), employees will reciprocate their experiencing of affective organisational commitment with intentions to stay at the organisation as their preferred employer.

Convergence of literature has firmly established negative correlations between organisational commitment and ITQ or actual quitting (Baakile, 2011; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaerner, 2000; Iverson & Buttigieg, 1999; Jepsen & Rodwell, 2012; Joo & Park, 2010; Lum, Kervin, Clark, Reid, & Sirola, 1998; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993; Perryer et al., 2010; Tumwesigye, 2010). These research outcomes are often derived from the probability that employees who are emotionally attached to their organisations will exhibit a low propensity to quit. It is on the strength of this argument that we hypothesise as follows:

**H1:** Affective organisational commitment has a significantly negative effect on ITQ.

### Psychological contract violation and intention to quit

A defining element in the psychological contract theory is the belief by an individual in a contractual relationship that a promise, or an obligation exists, and that the one party (often the employer) in the relationship is bound to fulfil its promises and obligations to the other (employee), irrespective of the explicit nature of the contract (Ali et al., 2010; Guest & Conway, 2002). Psychological contract violation therefore occurs when an employee perceives a failure by the organisation to honour its own part of the promises (Freese, Schalk, & Croon, 2011; Rousseau, 1995, 2011; Tomprou et al., 2015). Wolfe-Morrison and Robinson (1997) suggested that employees' perceived

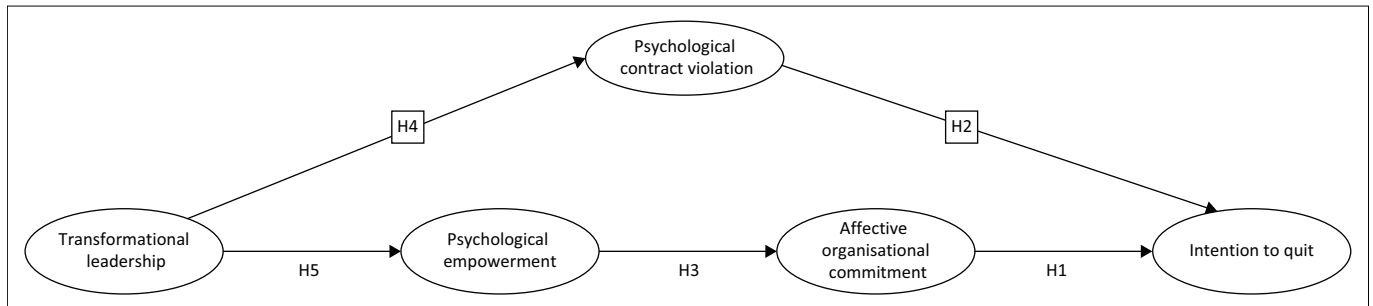


FIGURE 1: Conceptual model of the study.

violation could arise when an obligation owed to them by the employer remained unfulfilled, either because the employer lacked the ability or simply is not willing to perform the obligation. On the other hand, perceptions of violation may arise because of a blur or misunderstanding in the nature of owed expectation or obligation between the parties (incongruence) (Wolfe-Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Most often, such perceptions trigger a negative emotional and affective response that is expressed typically in the form of a considerable frustration and deep-rooted anger (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). The consequence of this response is the exertion of substantial and negative pressure on the employee's job satisfaction, activate their cognitive turnover intention, which ultimately results in actual turnover (Chen et al., 2008). Thus, according to SET (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) employees will reciprocate experiencing psychological contract violation with intentions to leave the organisation.

A considerable number of studies have investigated the relationship between employees' response to a state of psychological contract breach or violation and the resultant turnover intentions (Fu, 2007; Orvis, Dudley, & Cortina, 2008; Parzefall & Hakonen, 2010; Robinson & Morrison, 2000; Suazo, 2009). The outcome of these studies has consistently produced evidence of a link between perceived violations of the psychological contract and intended or actual turnover. A further interrogation of the literature specifically suggests that psychological contract violations, rather than breaches, are a better predictor of most turnover intentions (Fu, 2007; Paillé & Dufour, 2013; Suazo, 2009). However, both contract violations and breaches have been found to be positively related to employees' ITQ (Bunderson, 2001; Raja, Johns, & Ntaliansis, 2004; Shah Nawaz & Goswami, 2011; Suazo et al., 2005). In consideration of the previous research findings, we also argue in this article that employees who strongly perceive a violation of their psychological contract will most probably activate their turnover intention. We therefore hypothesise that:

**H2:** Psychological contract violation has a significantly positive effect on ITQ.

### Psychological empowerment and affective organisational commitment

Conger and Kanungo (1988) adopted a psychological approach in defining psychological empowerment as a process that reinforces feelings amongst individuals

regarding their ability to execute task at a prescribed level of standard if all organisational hierarchy and structures that constitute barriers are deliberately removed. Once these barriers are constrained, individuals or teams are motivated to initiate, demonstrate their competence and ability to perform, and assume responsibility for successful completion of tasks if they are provided with the requisite authority (Hass, 2010). Development of the literature on psychological empowerment is derived from the management theory of power and delegation of authority, which seeks to give an employee the right to control and use organisational resources to achieve desired organisational goals (Ugboro, 2006). Psychological empowerment is defined within the four cognitive dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). These dimensions are recognised as initiator and facilitator of organisational commitment amongst employees (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). Based on SET (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), employees will reciprocate experiencing psychological empowerment with high loyalty and commitment to the organisation.

Whilst a number of studies have examined the nature of the relationship that exists between psychological empowerment and organisational commitment, the results have consistently remained inconsistent. For example, whilst the results in Bhatnagar (2005) showed a positive relationship between some dimensions of psychological empowerment and organisational commitment, some other dimensions showed either a negative or no relationship to organisational commitment at all. Chen and Chen (2008) also recorded a similar research outcome to Bhatnagar. However, Jafari et al. (2013) found a significantly positive relationship between empowered employees and their commitment to the organisation. Whilst this inconsistency in results remains dominant in literature, a few other studies reported a significantly positive relationship between all the dimensions of psychological empowerment and affective organisational commitment (Chegini & Kheradmand, 2013; Joo & Shim, 2010; Raub & Robert, 2007).

As affective commitment is proximately associated with intrinsic motivation (Meyer et al., 1998), it is expected that psychological empowerment factors such as meaning and self-determination can arouse a sense of organisational commitment in employees. Consistent with literature, we hypothesise that:

**H3:** Psychological empowerment has a significantly positive effect on affective organisational commitment.

## Transformational leadership and psychological contract violation

The transformational leadership genre characteristically emphasises the values and importance of organisational goals and communicate the collective vision that inspires followers to look beyond their self-interests for the overall good of the organisation (Bass, 1985). The leader strategically creates an emotional bond with followers, with the intention of shaping their values, aspirations and priorities in alignment with that of the organisation (Antonakis & House, 2002). In adopting this strategy, the leader expects followers to develop an ultimate feeling of identity with both the leader and the entire team (Kark et al., 2003).

Bass (1985, 1995) and Bass and Avolio (1991, 1997), in their respective models, identified four dimensions upon which transformational leadership is founded. These dimensions are: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. Idealised influence is defined as behaviour that personifies the leader as a trustworthy, respectable and an energetic role model to the followers (Rowold & Heinitz, 2007). The essence of an idealised influence approach is therefore embedded in an ability of the leader to transform followers by creating changes in their goals, values, needs, beliefs and aspirations (Rowold & Heinitz 2007; Yukl, 2013). Inspirational motivation is intended essentially to achieve an emotional appeal and directing the efforts of team members to perform beyond the prescribed level, in the interest of the organisation (Ngodo, 2008). By means of intellectual stimulation, the leader engages in innovative activities that lead followers to challenge their own beliefs and values, including those of the leader and the organisation (Ngodo, 2008). This type of leadership behaviour stimulates followers to engage in independent thinking and take self-initiative in solving organisational problems (Bass 1985; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2006). Overall, transformational leadership consciously provides followers with direction, attention, structure, advice and feedback based on individual follower's needs and level of self-development through the process of individualised consideration (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2006; Yukl, 2013). And in doing so, transformational leaders raise the levels of expectations and increase the degree of confidence that enable followers to assume greater levels of responsibility and task accomplishment (Bass & Avolio, 1991).

We have, in the given section presented a large body of literature on the concept of psychological contract violation (see Ali et al., 2010; Freese et al., 2011; Guest & Conway, 2002; Rousseau, 1995, 2011; Tomprou et al., 2015). We have also attempted to establish the relationship between transformational leadership and psychological contract violation. In this regard, we argue that leaders who exhibit idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration behaviour will likely create a work climate that endorses the psychological contract between employees and the organisation. Based on SET (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), employees

will reciprocate transformational leadership behaviour with experiencing psychological contract fulfilment. The tendency therefore exists for employees to perceive that the leader's behaviour is an indication suggesting willingness on the part of employer to fulfil its promises and obligations. Such perception will potentially lead to the employees' experience of low levels of psychological contract violations. On the basis of the foregoing argument, we hypothesise that:

**H4:** Transformational leadership has a significantly negative effect on psychological contract violation.

## Transformational leadership and psychological empowerment

Having provided a conceptual articulation of psychological empowerment and transformational leadership (see development of hypotheses 3 and 4), we will consider the association between both constructs in this section.

Leadership empowerment is manifested through behaviours such as delegation of authority, accountability for outcomes, self-directed decision-making, information sharing, skills development and coaching for innovative performance (Konczak, Stelly, & Trusty, 2000). Consequent on the manifestation of these leadership empowerment behaviours, followers of transformational leaders often consider the meaningfulness and relevance of their work in relation to their personal values (Bono & Judge 2003). Deriving from this value proposition is the belief by subordinates that they have been empowered by their leader through the mechanisms of autonomy, meaning and ownership of their work. Therefore, based on SET (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), employees will reciprocate transformational leadership behaviour with experiencing psychological empowerment.

A sizeable number of studies have established relationships between the constructs of transformational leadership and psychological empowerment (Allameh et al., 2012; Dinh et al., 2014). Earlier studies have consistently found positive outcomes in the ability of a transformational leader to empower their followers by means of one or a combination of the dimensions of psychological empowerment. For example, Schlechter and Engelbrecht (2006) established a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and the meaning dimension of empowerment. This finding suggests that transformational leaders often exert influence to the extent to which their followers could find meaning in the way they value and achieve tasks.

Literature further provided evidence to suggest that empowered individuals do not wait passively for the work environment to provide direction. Instead, they take a positive and proactive approach in influencing their work environment (Spreitzer et al., 1999). This level of empowerment translates to task engagement, self-efficacy and independent thinking (Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002). The ultimate goal of this behaviour is the transformation

of followers into leaders themselves (Kark et al., 2003). This would be achieved through the empowerment dimensions of meaning, greater autonomy and assuming ownership of their performance (Avey et al., 2008). In light of the given discussion, we hypothesise that:

**H5:** Transformational leadership has a significantly positive effect on psychological empowerment.

## Conceptual model of the study

One of the purposes of this article is to conceptualise and assess the linear relationships amongst the constructs that we have discussed. We therefore present the conceptual model that depicts these relationships in Figure 1.

## Methods

### Samples and procedures

The study participants comprised 232 employees drawn from various public and private sector organisations in South Africa. A non-probability sampling method using a convenience technique was employed in the selection of participants for the study. Whilst a probability sampling method using random technique would have been preferable, it was impossible for us (like most organisation-based surveys) to obtain employee register (sampling frame) from management of the organisations surveyed; hence, the use of convenience technique. The demographic composition of participants comprised 131 (56%) females and 101 (44%) males. The average age of the respondents was 37.5 years. The majority (40.8%) of the respondents occupied middle-level management positions. All the respondents possessed tertiary education with varying organisational tenure.

We used a combination of paper and web-based standardised questionnaires to collect data from study participants. The questionnaire contained statements concerning the opinions of the respondents regarding the selected variables of the study. All items were measured on a six-point Likert Scale.

### Measures

*Transformational leadership* was measured using the 20-item Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), developed by Bass and Avolio (1995) and adapted by Engelbrecht et al. (2005). It was assessed through four subscales: (1) idealised influence (8 items), (2) inspirational motivation (4 items), (3) intellectual stimulation (4 items) and (4) individualised consideration (4 items). An example of the respective subscales were: 'My supervisor or manager emphasises the importance of having a collective sense of mission', 'My immediate my supervisor or manager talks optimistically about the future', 'my supervisor or manager gets me to look at problems from different perspectives', and 'My supervisor or manager considers me as having different needs, abilities and aspirations from others'.

*Intention to quit* was measured using a 6-item scale adapted from Becker (1992) (3 items), Cohen (1993) (2 items) and

DeConinck and Johnson (2009) (1 item). An example item statement was: 'I think a lot about leaving the organisation'.

*Affective organisational commitment* was measured through a 4-item scale that was adapted (only the positive scored items were used) from Allen and Meyer's (1996) Organisational Commitment Scale and previously used in studies by Karim and Noor (2006) and Yilmaz (2008). An example item statement was: 'I do feel emotionally attached to this organisation'.

*Psychological contract violation* was measured using the 4-item Psychological Contract Violation Scale adapted from the Psychological Contract Breach and Violation Scale developed by Robinson and Morrison (2000). The scale was adapted and used in a previous study by Knights and Kennedy (2005). An example item statement was: 'I feel that my organisation has violated the contract between us'.

*Psychological empowerment* was assessed with the 15-item Menon Empowerment Scale, which was adapted and used in the South African context by Kotze, Menon and Vos (2007). An example item statement was: 'I have the skills and abilities to do my job well'.

### Data analysis

Item analysis and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were used to determine the reliability and uni-dimensionality of the measuring instruments (Pallant, 2010). The construct validity of the structural model was measured using structural equation modelling (SEM) by means of partial least squares (PLS) (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). A rationale for using the PLS path modelling is its appropriateness for prediction-oriented research with emphasis on explaining variance in endogenous variables (e.g. ITQ) (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019; Henseler et al., 2009).

### Missing values

The imputation method was used to address the problem of missing values (Lohr, 1999). The PRELIS programme (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996) was used to impute missing values in the data set. After eliminating data that contained missing values using imputation, 207 of the original 232 questionnaires were useable for analysis.

## Results

Partial least squares-based SEM methodology was used to test the relationships amongst selected antecedents of ITQ amongst employees of the surveyed organisations. The results are presented in the following section.

### Item and dimensionality analysis

Findings of the item analysis indicated that all the Cronbach's alpha values surpassed the 0.70 criterion and revealed excellent reliability (> 0.90) (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Pallant, 2010) (see Table 1). Furthermore, all items exhibited acceptable item-total correlations (> 0.20) (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In

addition, all variables achieved adequate composite reliabilities ( $> 0.60$ ), as well as acceptable average variance extracted (AVE  $> 0.50$ ) (Henseler et al., 2009) (see Table 1). Thus, each scale demonstrated suitable internal consistency and reliability.

The uni-dimensionality of each scale and subscale was confirmed using EFA. Unrestricted principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation was executed on the various scales and subscales. All the scales and subscales showed uni-dimensionality. Sampling adequacy was assessed to determine the appropriateness of the correlation matrix of the items comprised in the scales before executing the EFA. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test surpassed the cut-off value that was utilised in this study ( $> 0.60$ ) (Hair et al., 2019). Bartlett's test of sphericity confirmed that the data were appropriate for factor analysis ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Pallant, 2010). The advice provided by Kinnear and Gray (2004), that is 'eigenvalue greater than 1' was used to establish the number of factors to be isolated. All the factor loadings for the subscales were within acceptable limits ( $> 0.50$ ) (Kinnear & Gray, 2004). The items in the scales explained an adequate percentage of the variance in the particular latent variables (61% to 82.4%) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

### Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity is a measure of the distinctness of a construct and tests whether constructs that are not supposed to be related are indeed unrelated (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was appraised by employing the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of each construct and the 95% confidence intervals (Hair et al., 2019). The PLS results established that all the postulated related latent variables passed the discriminant validity test (Farrell, 2010; Henseler et al., 2009) (see Table 2).

## Discussion

The PLS structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed in testing relationships amongst the variables of the study. The following section presents and discusses the results of the study as depicted in the PLS path diagram (see Figure 2).

### Affective organisational commitment and intention to quit

The PLS results produced a low, but significantly negative relationship between affective organisational commitment

**TABLE 1:** Reliability of measurement instruments.

Variables	Number of items	Item-total r	Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Affective organisational commitment	4	0.63–0.83	0.89	0.89	0.68
Intention to quit	6	0.60–0.89	0.92	0.92	0.66
Psychological contract violation	4	0.72–0.89	0.92	0.92	0.76
Psychological empowerment	15	0.42–0.77	0.91	0.93	0.82
Transformational leadership	20	0.68–0.92	0.98	0.98	0.71

and ITQ with a path coefficient of  $-0.53$  ( $p < 0.05$ ) (see Table 2). This suggests that a high level of affective organisational commitment is associated with low propensity to quit. This result confirmed the negative relationship that we postulated between the constructs in our hypothesis 1. Similarly, the result provides an empirical support for similar studies (e.g. Perryer et al., 2010; Tumwesigye, 2010). The expectation is that a high quality of emotional bond as presented by affective organisational commitment between individual employees and their organisation will decrease the probability of searching for an alternative employment. This argument is consistent with previous research outcomes that found a significant, negative association between affective organisational commitment and ITQ (Kuean et al., 2010). In their study, Kuean and colleagues identified affective commitment as the strongest predictor of turnover intention, arguing that employees with affectionate and emotional attachment to their organisation will be less likely to want to quit. Iverson and Buttigieg (1999) also reported that affective commitment exerts the most influence on employee retention.

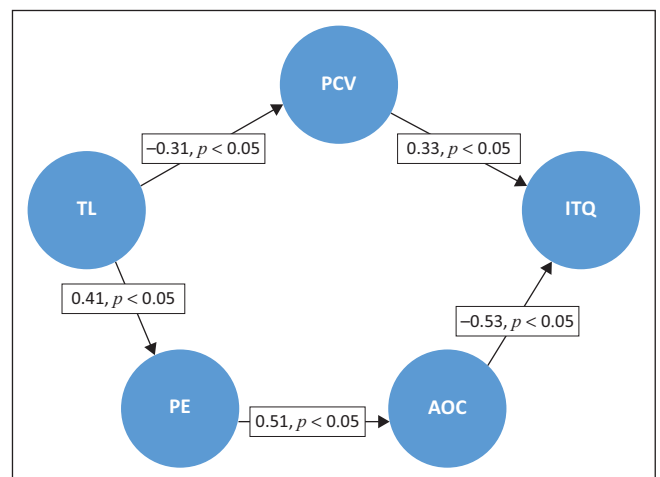
### Psychological contract violation and intention to quit

An analysis of the PLS results (path coefficient =  $0.33$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) showed a significant, positive relationship between psychological contract violation and ITQ (see Table 2). This

**TABLE 2:** Discriminant validity and relationships between latent variables.

Relationship between variables	Discriminant validity	Path coefficient	Status of hypothesis
Affective organisational commitment and intention to quit	Yes	$-0.53^*$	H1: Confirmed
Psychological contract violation and intention to quit	Yes	$0.33^*$	H2: Confirmed
Psychological empowerment and affective organisational commitment	Yes	$0.51^*$	H3: Confirmed
Transformational leadership and psychological contract violation	Yes	$-0.31^*$	H4: Confirmed
Transformational leadership and psychological empowerment	Yes	$0.41^*$	H5: Confirmed

$^*, p < 0.05$



TL, transformational leadership; PCV, psychological contract violation; PE, psychological empowerment; AOC, affective organisational commitment; ITQ, intention to quit.

**FIGURE 2:** The partial least squares path modelling results of the constructs of study.

result confirmed our statement in hypothesis 2, which predicted that psychological contract violation would have a significant and positive effect on ITQ. Our finding in this regard is a confirmation of previous research (e.g. Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Shahnawaz & Goswami, 2011; Suazo et al., 2005; Turnley & Feldman, 2000).

The praxis of this finding mostly relates to realities in developed and developing economic environments. The practical manifestation of our result may not necessarily find expression in underdeveloped economies where labour markets are characterised by heightened economic recessions, pervasively low or zero economic growths, retrenchment of workers and protracted high unemployment rates. Such economic environments are susceptible to unfair labour practices, including rampant and unfair dismissal of employees by their employers. Similarly, mobility of labour is significantly slow, thus decreasing the propensity for turnover intention amongst employees, who are considered to be 'privileged' to have had a job, in the first instance. Therefore, the crucial decision option for individuals who are experiencing psychological contract violation would be that of job security, as opposed to embarking on a futile search for non-existent alternative jobs (Shahnawaz & Goswami, 2011). This environmental economic description typically prevails mostly in underdeveloped economic contexts.

### Psychological empowerment and affective organisational commitment

The PLS results (path coefficient = 0.51,  $p < 0.05$ ) showed a significant, positive association between psychological empowerment and affective organisational commitment (see Table 2). The result therefore confirmed our hypothesis 3 as stated: a significant and positive relationship between the two independent constructs. This result confirmed previous results and found considerable empirical support (e.g. Joo & Shim, 2010; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Liu et al. 2006; Raub & Robert, 2007). Reporting a similar result, Jafari et al. (2013) contended that the degree of commitment demonstrated by employees is relatively dependent on the amount of empowerment they receive from the organisation. The authors further argued that the meaning dimension of psychological empowerment provides a suitable alignment between the requirements and purposes of job roles and the personal value system of an individual. This person-organisation fit results in the creation of attachment to the work, and by extension, the organisation.

Chegini and Kheradmand (2013) found a significantly positive relationship between all the dimensions of psychological empowerment and affective organisational commitment. A sense of competence, the authors argued, instils belief and confidence that employees have the ability and skills to accomplish their work assignments. Again, employees develop affective commitment when they perceive a sense of self-determination, to the extent that the organisation involves and gives them autonomy over their work and a voice in work-related decision-making processes.

### Transformational leadership and psychological contract violation

The PLS analysis of the relationship between transformational leadership and psychological contract violation revealed a significant and negative association (path coefficient =  $-0.31$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , Table 2), thus confirming our statement of Hypothesis 4. Our concerted search of extant literature has not produced evidence of any existing study that examined the relationship between transformational leadership and psychological contract violation. However, Jafri (2016) did examine the relationship between a range of leadership styles (including transformational leadership) and psychological contract (but not its violation).

The SET provides a plausible framework within which the findings of our study can be explained. For example, the individualised consideration dimension of the transformational leadership behaviour involves the leader creating an enabling environment for task achievement, paying attention to individual employee's personal needs and concerns (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1991, 1997). In this context, the enabling work environment could include providing training and coaching for work groups and rendering financial support and rewards to individual followers, according to their needs. This can be explained further through the two types of psychological contracts that could be violated by the employer, that is, relational and transactional. For instance, relational contracts are premised on the beliefs about obligations that are based on exchanges of socio-emotional factors (e.g. loyalty and support) rather than purely monetary (i.e. transactional) consideration (Grimmer & Oddy, 2007). The overall effect of a leader communicating a new vision by means of inspiration and emotional appeals is the establishment of both social and emotional bonds between the leader and the followers (Ngodo, 2008). Leaders and their followers can therefore develop the idealised influence attribute of the transformational leadership type to full emotional identification.

Furthermore, the nature of relational contracts includes the inspirational motivation dimension of transformational leadership behaviour through which followers are inspired and motivated to embrace and become committed to the shared vision of the organisation. By means of inspirational motivation, transformational leadership communicates high expectations to followers, which inspires them and creates in them the desire to become committed to and involved in efforts to realise the shared vision in the organisation. Transformational leadership is also known for creating trust, in both the leader and organisation. Consequently, whilst employees with low trust are more likely to look for incidents of violation, those with higher trust would rather ignore, diminish or not consider the violation as a significant event (Robinson, 1996). In the same dimension, Grimmer and Oddy (2007) argued that a relational type of association is capable of arousing feelings of affective involvement or attachment in



employees, leading the employer to reciprocate the gesture by providing not only financial support to individual employees but also investments such as training, personal and career development and job security. One can therefore find a synergy between transformational leadership behaviours and relational contracts, which tend to describe perceived obligations that are emotional and intrinsic in nature (Grimmer & Oddy, 2007).

### **Transformational leadership and psychological empowerment**

The PLS analysis found a significant, positive link between transformational leadership and psychological empowerment (0.41,  $p < 0.05$ , see Table 2). Thus, our Hypothesis 5, which states a significant, positive relationship between the two variables, was supported. A considerable body of literature has found a consistently significant and positive relationship between transformational leadership and psychological empowerment (Allameh et al., 2012; Dinh et al., 2014). Similarly, Bono and Judge (2003) emphasised the importance with which followers of transformational leaders considered the significance of their work, and how it aligned with their personal values. Followers of transformational leaders therefore tend to believe that the essence of their empowerment is perhaps manifested through greater autonomy, meaning and ownership of their work. This tendency is consistent with the motivational strategies that are often adopted by transformational leaders. These are achieved by increasing followers' self-efficacy, facilitating followers' social identification with their group or organisation and linking the organisation's work values to those of their followers' (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). These mechanisms enable followers to feel greater levels of self-determination in their work and to increase their level of perceived empowerment. Leadership authors such as Dvir et al. (2002) further confirmed that subordinates feel a great sense of empowerment when they perceive an attribute of transformational leadership and behaviours in their supervisor. The authors further contend that such perception by employees lead to their engagement in the task, self-efficacy and ability to think independently.

At a dimensional level, Schlechter and Engelbrecht (2006) provided evidence of a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and meaning (a major dimension of empowerment). The authors' finding seems to suggest the extent to which transformational leaders exert influences that enable their followers to find meaning, by affecting what people do, and how they find value in what they do and significance in their achievement. Earlier, Spreitzer et al. (1999) argued that empowered individuals do not wait passively for the work environment to provide direction and instead they take a proactive approach towards shaping and influencing their work environment. Followers of transformational leaders are therefore known to exhibit high level of empowerment through greater

autonomy, meaning and assuming ownership of their work (Avey et al., 2008).

### **Limitations and suggestion for future research**

The use of cross-sectional research design, together with convenience sampling technique is often known to pose methodological limitations to a study of this nature. Whilst the design inhibits us from making conclusions regarding causality amongst the variables, the sampling procedure raises concern about sample representativeness and thus limiting the prospect of generalisation of the results to other contexts (Bryman, Bell, & Harley, 2019). Of similar concern, particularly for future studies, is the use of self-reporting measurements, as well as a one stop collection and analysis of data (cross-sectional). We therefore suggest the use of a longitudinal research design by future researchers to determine causality.

Lastly, both methodological procedures (design and sampling) potentially raise concerns for a common method bias (Bryman et al., 2019). Hence, future studies could collect data from multiple sources to rule out common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012).

### **Theoretical contribution**

Drawing from the findings of this study, we submit that this article achieved the theory testing or theory-confirmation objective of a quantitative research strategy. Whilst we do not intend to claim exclusive novelty regarding the result of the path between transformational leadership and psychological contract violation, it nonetheless presents a new empirical evidence, and salient contribution to existing body of knowledge because to the best of our literature search, no previous study has explicitly explored that path of investigation.

### **Managerial implication**

We further submit that the conceptual model of this study offers a psychological framework through which retention strategy and related human resources policies could be formulated. Given the strong influence that the transformational leadership behaviour exerts on turnover intention and its psychological antecedents, organisations should consciously embrace and promote this leadership genre across all levels of management. Perhaps, and further to our other recommendations in this article, future researchers should replicate this study in hierarchical organisational structures where leadership practices such as rigid control or autocratic leadership styles still prevail.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the present study has demonstrated that transformational leadership, psychological empowerment, affective organisational commitment and psychological contract violation are important explanatory contributors to

intention to leave an organisation. Therefore, organisations that wish to counteract destructive employee turnover need to take those aspects seriously into account in the implementation of their employee retention strategies.

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally to this work.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author, and the Publisher/s.

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