

# Instructional Leadership and Teacher Commitment: The Mediating Role of Workplace Harmony in Educational Settings

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## ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper synthesises post-2015 scholarship to examine how a headmaster's instructional leadership influences teacher commitment through the mediating role of workplace harmony. Drawing on research in educational leadership, organisational psychology, cross-cultural studies, and technology integration, it argues that relational, collaboratively oriented instructional leadership, characterised by shared decision-making and support for teacher collaboration, fosters harmonious work environments that strengthen teachers' affective, normative, and professional commitment. The review foregrounds meta-analyses, multilevel and structural equation modelling, longitudinal designs, qualitative case studies and mixed-methods research conducted up to 2025. The paper assumes that the mediating role of workplace harmony is broadly generalisable, while recognising that its strength is moderated by cultural and organisational factors. It also notes limitations arising from scarce evidence in non-Western, rural and virtual or AI-integrated settings, heavy reliance on self-report data, limited longitudinal work and potential cultural bias in measurement instruments. Future research directions include localised studies in Chinese high schools and rural or underdeveloped regions, longitudinal and mixed-methods investigations of dynamic mediation processes, and empirical examinations of virtual and AI-integrated instructional leadership. The paper further recommends advanced multilevel and structural equation modelling (SEM) approaches, alongside cross-cultural field experiments to test hybrid digital-relational leadership models across diverse educational systems.

**Keywords:** Instructional leadership, workplace harmony, teachers' commitment, headmaster

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## Introduction

Instructional leadership has long been recognised as a central pillar of effective schooling because of its direct role in shaping teaching quality, pupil achievement, and the organisational climate. Effective instructional leaders ensure that the curriculum is implemented in a well-planned manner, pedagogical practices are continuously monitored and improved, and a school culture that supports learning is strengthened. Through consistent focus on teaching and learning, instructional leadership helps create a work environment that is well-structured, goal-oriented, and conducive to teachers' professional growth.

In contemporary schooling, instructional leadership is also expected to remain effective under changing conditions, including digitally mediated coordination, distributed work routines, and increased accountability pressures. Evidence from

Malaysian schools indicates that principals' virtual instructional leadership can meaningfully strengthen teachers' commitment, suggesting that instructional leadership practices retain their influence even when leadership is enacted through e-leadership channels and technology-supported interactions (Awang et al., 2022).

In recent years, the focus on instructional leadership has expanded to include teacher commitment as one of the key outcomes of leadership practice. Teacher commitment is commonly treated as a multidimensional construct reflecting teachers' emotional attachment, sense of obligation, and professional dedication to the school and its mission. From an educational management perspective, organizational commitment—described as teachers' emotional and professional attachment to the institution—remains a critical resource for sustaining instructional quality, improving job satisfaction, and supporting overall school effectiveness (Mahmutoglu et al., 2025).

However, the specific mechanisms through which instructional leadership is translated into enhanced teacher commitment remain underexplored, thereby highlighting the need to identify the mediating processes that operate between these constructs. One plausible and increasingly policy-relevant mechanism is workplace harmony, conceptualised in school settings as the quality of professional relationships, collegial support, collaboration, mutual trust, and shared responsibility within the school community. Recent TALIS 2024 reporting emphasises that strong professional relationships—among teachers, principals, students, and parents—are associated with teachers' well-being and job satisfaction, underscoring the strategic role of relational conditions in shaping teachers' work experiences (OECD, 2025).

Empirical work on school climate further supports this relational pathway: a positive school climate—encompassing relationships, leadership, and organisational culture—promotes collaboration, trust, and belonging, and has been linked to teachers' job satisfaction and commitment-related outcomes (Qu et al., 2024). Evidence from Malaysia likewise shows that teachers in challenging contexts benefit from a consistent and supportive school climate, operationalised through dimensions such as collaboration, student relations, decision-making, school resources, and instructional innovation (Kamarudin et al., 2022). Together, these findings justify conceptualising workplace harmony—as a relationally grounded climate—as a theoretically meaningful 'bridge' between leadership practices and teachers' sustained commitment.

Moreover, examining harmony is also important because relational disruption can undermine commitment and performance. For example, research in school settings, shows that leadership can reduce negative interpersonal dynamics such as workplace exclusion, partly through strengthening school effectiveness—highlighting how leadership shapes relational conditions that either enable or erode positive engagement at work (Kandemir, 2024). In a complementary manner, large-scale evidence indicates that teacher trust and teacher commitment may jointly transmit the effects of school leadership to student outcomes, reinforcing the plausibility of relational pathways (e.g., trust/harmony) as mediators rather than merely background conditions (Zhu et al., 2022).

Therefore, this article positions workplace harmony as a mediating construct to clarify how instructional leadership fosters teacher commitment. By integrating leadership-for-learning perspectives with relational and climate-based mechanisms, the paper aims to strengthen conceptual precision regarding workplace harmony in educational settings in educational settings and to advance a testable model

explaining why instructional leadership may yield stronger teacher commitment in schools where professional relationships are collaborative, trusting, and psychologically safe (Kurrle et al., 2025).

Accordingly, workplace harmony has emerged as an important mediating factor in the relationship between instructional leadership and teacher commitment. This harmony is characterised by the presence of trust, collaboration, emotional support, and a supportive and inclusive work climate. Understanding how workplace harmony functions as a bridge linking instructional leadership practices to levels of teacher commitment is critical to designing leadership interventions that are more effective and context-sensitive, particularly in an era of rapid technological change and increasing cultural diversity in schools (Hulpia et al., 2011; Lemahieu, 1997; Ridwan et al., 2024).

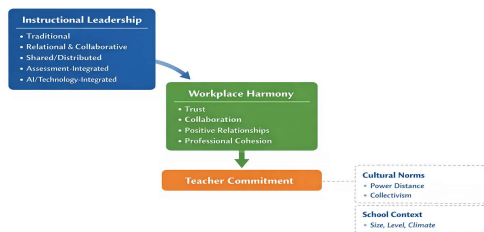
### **Conceptual Frameworks: Instructional Leadership and Workplace Harmony**

Instructional leadership is defined as a leadership style that focuses on improving teaching and learning through the headmaster's direct involvement in curricular and instructional issues, including emphasis on content standards, performance assessment, teacher practices, and the school environment (Lemahieu, 1997; Xhomara, 2021). Within this framework, the headmaster is not merely an organisational administrator, but also serves as the key driver of teaching quality, steering curriculum direction, coordinates instructional strategies, and ensures continuous professional support for teachers. A clear understanding of instructional leadership forms an important foundation for explaining how leadership practices can influence workplace harmony and, subsequently, teachers' commitment to the school. Instructional leadership models have evolved from traditional approaches to more relational and collaborative frameworks. Traditional models view the headmaster as an evaluator, helper, integrator, and designer who controls and organises the implementation of teaching and curriculum in the school (Bridges, 1967; Southworth, 2013; Southworth, 2002). Subsequently, relational models emphasise the headmaster's relationships with the self (reflection and personal competence), middle leaders, teachers, and external stakeholders, thereby recognising that the quality of social and professional relationships is central to the effectiveness of instructional leadership (Shaked, 2024). This development is further supported by the paradigm of shared/distributed leadership, which provides space for teacher participation in decision-making processes, which are influenced by teachers' level of professionalisation and the current educational policy context (Zhan et al., 2023).

More recently, instructional leadership frameworks have also integrated the roles of assessment and

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technology, including artificial intelligence (AI), as core components of leadership practice. Assessment-integrated models position assessment as a primary responsibility of school leaders to support instructional design, monitor learning and enhance the motivation of teachers and students (Yakimowski et al., 2025). At the same time, AI-integrated models highlight the role of the headmaster as a leader of AI adoption for data-driven decision-making, more personalised instructional planning, and optimisation of instructional resources (Bixler et al., 2025; Goel, 2025). When implemented strategically and with sensitivity to context, these models have the potential to foster a more harmonious work climate grounded in trust and collaboration, thereby enhancing workplace harmony and teacher commitment. The conceptual framework is shown as in the diagram 1 below.



**Diagram 1: Conceptual Frameworks Workplace Harmony: Constructs and Relevance**

Workplace harmony is defined as a school environment characterised by collaboration, trust, collegiality, and supportive relationships among school staff (Hulpia et al., 2011; Elvitopu et al., 2025; Gümüş et al., 2025). In this context, interactions between teachers, middle leaders and administrators are built on mutual respect, interdependence and a willingness to support one another. Harmony refers not only to the absence of open conflict, but also to the presence of a positive emotional climate, a sense of belonging and a consistent level of social support. Such an environment contributes to teachers' psychological well-being, organisational stability and the school's capacity to implement continuous improvement agendas.

Among the core components of workplace harmony are collaboration and collective efficacy, whereby teachers engage in joint work and share a belief in their collective capability to achieve school goals (Thien et al., 2024; Cansoy et al., 2022). When teachers feel that their efforts are supported by colleagues and leadership, they are more willing to share best practices, try new approaches and address instructional challenges collectively. Trust in leaders and colleagues, in turn, forms the foundation for teachers' readiness to accept change, participate in new initiatives and sustain long-term commitment to the school (Price, 2021; Zayim et al., 2015). This trust reduces suspicion and uncertainty, thereby strengthening teachers' willingness to support

leadership decisions and collaborate in the implementation of reforms.

Collegiality and autonomy complete the dimensions of workplace harmony by fostering professional respect and the freedom to innovate in teaching (Xie et al., 2025; Kelchtermans, 2006). Teachers who are given space to make pedagogical decisions and whose professional views are valued tend to display higher levels of commitment and stronger intrinsic motivation. At the same time, professional learning communities function as ongoing collaborative platforms for inquiry, reflection, and improvement of practice, thereby structuring collaboration and professional dialogue in a systematic manner (Voelkel, 2022; Xiu et al., 2022). The combination of collegiality, autonomy, and professional learning communities not only strengthens workplace harmony but also acts as a catalyst for enhancing teacher commitment and improving the quality of teaching in schools.

## Integrating Instructional Leadership and Workplace Harmony

Instructional leadership frameworks increasingly integrate the construct of workplace harmony by foregrounding relational and collaborative dimensions of leadership practice. Rather than focusing solely on supervision and compliance, contemporary models underscore the importance of leaders' capacity to build trust, nurture positive interpersonal relationships, and create emotionally safe environments in which teachers can thrive (Ridwan et al., 2024; Zhan et al., 2023; Barth et al., 2023). In this view, instructional leadership is conceptualised not only as the management of curriculum and instruction, but also as the shaping of the social and cultural conditions that enable high-quality teaching and learning.

Within these integrated frameworks, effective leaders deliberately cultivate conditions in which trust, shared decision-making and professional learning communities are embedded in the daily life of the school. They involve teachers in key instructional and organisational decisions, encourage open dialogue about practice, and provide structured opportunities for collaborative inquiry and reflection. These practices support teachers' psychological well-being by reducing isolation, enhancing professional recognition, and strengthening their sense of agency—contributions that, in turn, promote greater organisational coherence, collective efficacy and school-wide effectiveness (Ridwan et al., 2024; Zhan et al., 2023; Barth et al., 2023).

Taken together, the evolution of instructional leadership models reflects a growing recognition that leadership effectiveness is inseparable from the quality of workplace relationships and the broader school climate. The integration of workplace

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harmony into leadership frameworks signals a shift away from narrowly managerial approaches towards models that prioritise relational trust, collegiality and collaboration as central mechanisms of school improvement. This synthesis suggests that sustainable gains in teaching quality and student outcomes depend not only on technical leadership functions but also on leaders' ability to cultivate harmonious, supportive, and professionally enriching work environments for teachers.

### **Instructional Leadership and Its Impact on Workplace Harmony**

Instructional leadership contributes to workplace harmony through the deliberate creation of structures that promote collaboration and collective responsibility among teachers. By organising joint planning sessions, co-teaching arrangements, and collaborative data discussions, instructional leaders provide systematic opportunities for teachers to work together on curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy (Cansoy et al., 2022; Goddard et al., 2015). These collaborative structures strengthen collective efficacy by fostering shared beliefs in teachers' collective capability to address instructional challenges and achieve school goals. In turn, this sense of "working together with purpose" lays a strong foundation for harmonious relationships and a cohesive professional culture.

A second key mechanism is empowerment, operationalised through distributed leadership and shared decision-making processes. When instructional leaders involve teachers in decisions related to instructional strategies, resource allocation and school improvement initiatives, they signal trust in teachers' professional judgement and expertise (Ma et al., 2025; Hsieh et al., 2024). This empowerment enhances teachers' autonomy and creates space for innovation in classroom practice, as teachers feel authorised to experiment with new approaches and adapt instruction to student needs. At the same time, leaders who intentionally cultivate a positive and supportive school climate characterised by trust, collegiality, and mutual respect reinforce these empowering practices and further consolidate workplace harmony (Selvitopu et al., 2025; Gümüş et al., 2025).

Instructional leadership also shapes workplace harmony through sustained support for professional learning and the development of professional learning communities. Leaders who prioritise ongoing professional development, provide access to relevant training, and allocate time for collaborative inquiry demonstrate a commitment to teachers' growth and well-being (Voelkel, 2022; Xiu et al., 2022). By institutionalising professional learning communities as forums for reflective dialogue, joint problem-solving, and continuous improvement, leaders embed collaboration and shared learning into

the daily fabric of school life. These professional learning structures not only enhance instructional quality but also strengthen interpersonal bonds, trust, and a shared sense of purpose, thereby reinforcing a harmonious and supportive work environment.

### **Contextual and Cultural Moderators**

Contextual and cultural factors moderate the effectiveness of instructional leadership in promoting workplace harmony. Cultural dimensions such as power distance, collectivism, and individualism shape how leadership behaviours are perceived and enacted in schools (Liu et al., 2018; Kaya et al., 2025; Selvitopu et al., 2025). In high power-distance contexts, teachers may expect more directive leadership and may be less inclined to question decisions, which can both stabilise and constrain collaborative practices. By contrast, in more collectivist cultures, shared goals, group loyalty, and interdependence may naturally reinforce collaborative norms and collective responsibility, whereas more individualistic cultures may prioritise personal autonomy and self-expression, requiring leaders to balance professional freedom with the cultivation of shared values and workplace harmony (Liu et al., 2018; Kaya et al., 2025; Selvitopu et al., 2025).

School context, particularly the distinction between rural and urban settings, further influences the pathways and strength of leadership effects on workplace harmony. In rural schools, where staff numbers tend to be smaller and relationships more close-knit, leadership often relies on informal interactions, personalised support, and people-centred approaches that leverage strong interpersonal ties to maintain harmony (Liu et al., 2018; O'Shea et al., 2022). Urban schools, by contrast, may be more structurally complex and diverse, requiring more formalised systems, clearer role delineation and structured collaborative mechanisms to ensure coherence and reduce conflict. These contextual differences mean that similar instructional leadership practices can produce varying outcomes, depending on how they align with the social fabric and organisational realities of the school.

At the national and local levels, leadership practices are also shaped by broader cultural values, which in turn influence school climate and workplace harmony (Kaya et al., 2025; Thien et al., 2023). Policy discourses, societal norms, and national educational philosophies inform expectations about authority, participation and relationships in schools, guiding how leaders frame their roles and interact with teachers. Local cultural values, such as community solidarity, religious norms, or regional traditions, further condition what is considered legitimate, respectful, or harmonious behaviour in the school context. Taken together, these contextual and cultural moderators underscore that the impact of

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instructional leadership on workplace harmony is context-dependent, contingent on the alignment between leadership practices, cultural norms, and the specific conditions of the school environment (Liu et al., 2018; Selvitopu et al., 2025; O'shea et al., 2022; Thien et al., 2023).

### **Innovative and Distributed Leadership Approaches**

Distributed leadership represents an innovative approach that extends and, in some cases, surpasses traditional instructional leadership in directly promoting teacher autonomy, collaboration, and collective innovativeness (Goel, 2025; Ma et al., 2025; Y. Liu et al., 2022). By intentionally sharing leadership responsibilities with teachers and middle leaders, principals create opportunities for broader participation in decision-making, problem-solving, and school improvement initiatives. This distributed configuration enables teachers to exercise professional judgement, contribute to strategic planning, and co-own instructional reforms, thereby strengthening their sense of agency and commitment. In turn, these dynamics foster a more collaborative and inclusive school culture in which workplace harmony is sustained through shared responsibility and mutual influence rather than reliance on a single authoritative leader.

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies introduces additional possibilities for strengthening collaboration and supporting teacher well-being, while also raising new questions about their impact on workplace harmony and commitment (Assayed et al., 2025; Awang et al., 2022; Komariyah et al., 2024). AI tools can facilitate data-driven decision making, personalise professional development, streamline administrative tasks and enable virtual collaboration across time and space. Virtual leadership models, supported by digital platforms, may help leaders maintain communication, provide feedback, and coordinate professional learning communities more efficiently, potentially reducing workload pressures and burnout. However, the effects of AI and technology integration are highly context-dependent, influenced by factors such as digital literacy, infrastructure, perceptions of surveillance, and trust in leadership. These contingencies underscore the need for further empirical research to understand when and how technology-enhanced leadership contributes positively to workplace harmony and teacher commitment, rather than exacerbating stress or inequality.

Taken together, these developments suggest that instructional leadership shapes workplace harmony through multiple, often contextually moderated, mechanisms that span both traditional and innovative approaches. Effective leaders are those who can read their cultural and organisational contexts and adapt

their strategies accordingly, combining clear instructional guidance with distributed leadership, relational trust-building, and judicious use of AI and digital tools. Rather than rigidly adhering to a single model, they strategically leverage complementary practices that empower teachers, support collaboration, and protect well-being. In doing so, they foster a harmonious and collaborative environment in which teachers feel respected, involved and supported, creating favourable conditions for sustained commitment and continuous improvement.

### **Workplace Harmony as a Mediator Between Instructional Leadership and Teacher Commitment**

#### **Empirical Evidence for Mediation**

Empirical studies increasingly support the role of workplace harmony as a mediating mechanism between instructional leadership and teacher commitment. One of the most frequently identified mediators is collective teacher efficacy, which captures teachers shared beliefs in their collective capacity to influence student learning and achieve school goals. Instructional leadership that provides clear instructional direction, meaningful feedback, and structured opportunities for collaborative problem-solving has been shown to strengthen collective teacher efficacy, which in turn predicts higher levels of commitment to the school, students, teaching tasks, and the teaching profession as a whole (Thien et al., 2024; Cansoy et al., 2022; Y. Liu et al., 2021). In this way, collective efficacy functions as a psychological bridge, translating leadership practices into sustained commitment across multiple domains.

Collaboration and trust have also been empirically identified as key relational processes that mediate the relationship between instructional leadership and teacher commitment. When leaders promote authentic teacher collaboration through joint planning, peer observation, and shared inquiry into student data, teachers experience a stronger sense of professional community and mutual support (Raza et al., 2020; Yazici et al., 2022). At the same time, trust in leadership, built through fairness, consistency, and competence, enhances teachers' willingness to embrace school goals and to internalise organisational values. This collaborative and trusting relationships are particularly influential for affective commitment (emotional attachment to the school) and normative commitment (a felt obligation to remain), indicating that teachers are more likely to stay, and to invest effort, when they feel connected to colleagues and confident in their leaders (Raza et al., 2020; Yazici et al., 2022).

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More broadly, workplace harmony, reflected in a supportive organisational culture and participative decision-making, has been shown to enhance organisational commitment and mediate the effects of instructional leadership on teacher outcomes (Hulpia et al., 2011; Devos et al., 2014). Leaders who encourage open communication, recognise teacher contributions, and involve staff in key decisions create a climate in which teachers feel respected, valued, and psychologically safe. Such a supportive culture not only reduces stress and conflict but also reinforces shared purpose and collective responsibility, thereby strengthening teachers' commitment to the organisation. Empirical evidence thus suggests that the impact of instructional leadership on teacher commitment is not merely direct but operates substantially through the quality of workplace relationships and climate, with workplace harmony serving as a central mediating pathway (Hulpia et al., 2011; Devos et al., 2014).

### **Dimensions of Teacher Commitment Influenced by Harmony**

Workplace harmony exerts a significant influence on teachers' affective commitment, which refers to their emotional attachment to the school. In a harmonious environment characterised by positive relationships, psychological safety, and a supportive organisational climate, teachers are more likely to experience a sense of belonging and pride in being part of the school community (Thien et al., 2024; Thien et al., 2023). Daily interactions marked by respect, appreciation and collegial support strengthen teachers' identification with the school and reduce feelings of isolation or alienation. As a result, harmonious workplace conditions not only enhance teachers' satisfaction and well-being but also deepen their desire to remain in the school and contribute meaningfully to its mission.

Normative commitment, defined as a sense of moral obligation or felt duty to remain in the organisation, is also shaped by the quality of workplace relationships. When teachers perceive high levels of trust in leadership, experience genuine collaboration with colleagues, and share strong beliefs in their collective capability to improve student outcomes, they are more likely to feel that staying in the school is "the right thing to do" (Thien et al., 2024). Trust and collaboration foster reciprocal obligations: teachers feel supported by the organisation and, in turn, feel obliged to reciprocate through loyalty, persistence, and willingness to go beyond minimum role expectations. Collective efficacy further reinforces this sense of duty, as teachers come to view their continued involvement as essential to sustaining the team's capacity to achieve its goals.

Professional commitment, which reflects dedication to teaching as a lifelong vocation, is closely linked to the presence of professional learning communities

and collegial networks within a harmonious workplace. In schools where leaders support ongoing professional development and teachers engage in collaborative inquiry, peer coaching, and reflective dialogue, teaching is experienced as a dynamic and intellectually fulfilling profession rather than a routine job (Mavi et al., 2025; S. Liu et al., 2024). Collegiality offers both emotional and intellectual support, enabling teachers to refine their practice, share innovations, and reaffirm the value and purpose of their work. These professional learning structures, embedded in a harmonious and respectful climate, strengthen teachers' long-term commitment to teaching as a profession, even beyond their attachment to a particular school.

### **Cultural and Organizational Contexts of Mediation**

The mediating role of workplace harmony between instructional leadership and teacher commitment is shaped in important ways by cultural context. Empirical evidence indicates that the strength and nature of this mediation vary across cultural settings, particularly along dimensions such as collectivism and power distance (Thien et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2018). In collectivist contexts, shared norms of group loyalty, interdependence, and mutual support tend to amplify the effects of collaborative practices, making workplace harmony a more powerful conduit for leadership influences on commitment. In high power distance cultures, teachers may be more accepting of hierarchical authority and thus, harmony mediated by trust and respectful leader-follower relationships can play a critical role in legitimising leadership and translating directives into genuine commitment. These cultural patterns suggest that similar leadership behaviours can have different mediating effects depending on how they align with prevailing cultural expectations and values (Thien et al., 2023; Kaya et al., 2025).

Organizational factors within schools' further condition how workplace harmony mediates the impact of instructional leadership. School size, level, and climate each influence the formation and sustainability of harmonious relationships and collective processes (Gümüş et al., 2025; Çoğaltay et al., 2023). In smaller schools, closer interpersonal ties and more frequent face-to-face interactions may facilitate the development of trust, collaboration, and collective efficacy, thereby strengthening the mediating role of workplace harmony. In larger or more complex schools, leaders may need more formal structures such as clearly defined teams, professional learning communities and communication channels to maintain cohesion and mitigate fragmentation. Similarly, differences between primary and secondary schools, or between schools with supportive versus conflict-prone climates, shape the extent to which leadership efforts can be effectively channelled through harmonious

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workplace dynamics to enhance teacher commitment (Gümüş et al., 2025; Çoğaltay et al., 2023).

Taken together, the mediating role of workplace harmony is empirically robust, with collective teacher efficacy, collaboration, and trust emerging as key mechanisms linking instructional leadership to multiple dimensions of teacher commitment. However, the impact of these mediators is neither uniform nor automatic; it is shaped by the interplay of cultural norms and organisational characteristics that enable or constrain harmonious relationships. These findings underscore the need for context-sensitive leadership practices that deliberately cultivate workplace harmony in ways that resonate with local cultural values and organisational realities. Effective instructional leaders, therefore, are those who recognise and respond to these contextual contingencies, adapting their strategies to strengthen harmony, build collective capacity, and ultimately sustain teacher commitment (Thien et al., 2023; Kaya et al., 2025; Gümüş et al., 2025; Çoğaltay et al., 2023).

### **Mechanisms and Components of Workplace Harmony**

#### **Collective Teacher Efficacy**

Collective teacher efficacy, defined as the shared belief among teachers in their collective ability to positively influence student learning, is a central mechanism of workplace harmony (Thien et al., 2024). When instructional leaders provide clear direction, resources, and opportunities for joint problem-solving, they strengthen teachers' collective confidence in their capacity to meet instructional challenges and achieve school goals. This shared sense of capability not only enhances motivation and perseverance but also links instructional leadership to teacher commitment and wider organisational outcomes, particularly in collectivist cultures where group success and interdependence are highly valued (Cansoy et al., 2022). In such contexts, collective efficacy becomes a powerful channel through which leadership practices are transformed into a strong sense of shared purpose and loyalty to the school.

Alongside collective efficacy, trust, autonomy and collegiality constitute critical relational and professional components of workplace harmony. Trust in leaders and colleagues, built through fairness, consistency, competence, and open communication, predicts teachers' readiness for change and reduces resistance to new initiatives (Price, 2021; Zayim et al., 2015). When teachers believe that leaders act in their best interests and that colleagues are supportive, they are more willing to take risks, share concerns, and commit to school-wide goals. Teacher autonomy, understood as discretion over pedagogical decisions and classroom practices, further enhances job satisfaction and

commitment, especially when it is exercised within a positive and supportive climate (Xie et al., 2025). Collegiality, characterised by professional respect, mutual support and collaborative engagement, reinforces a sense of belonging and commitment by affirming teachers' professional identity and value within the school community (Kelchtermans, 2006; Hargreaves, 2019).

Professional learning communities (PLCs) and structured collaboration provide the organisational vehicles through which these components of workplace harmony are enacted and sustained. PLCs involve sustained collaborative inquiry, shared reflection, and continuous improvement efforts, and have been shown to mediate the effect of instructional leadership on teacher commitment by embedding professional growth and collective problem-solving in everyday school life (Voelkel, 2022; Xiu et al., 2022; S. Liu et al., 2024). Collaboration on joint work related to curriculum, assessment, and instructional improvement strengthens collective efficacy and deepens harmonious relationships, as teachers experience themselves as part of a cohesive, goal-oriented team (Goddard et al., 2015; Meyer et al., 2025). Taken together, the components of workplace harmony—collective efficacy, trust, autonomy, collegiality, and professional learning communities—are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, collectively mediating the relationship between instructional leadership and teacher commitment, and creating a stable foundation for sustained organisational effectiveness.

### **Leadership Styles, School Culture, and the Moderation of Workplace Harmony**

#### **Leadership Styles and Their Effects**

Instructional leadership influences workplace harmony and teacher commitment primarily through the development of collective teacher efficacy and structured collaboration. Leaders who focus on curriculum, teaching quality and data-informed decision-making create clear expectations and provide consistent instructional support, which strengthens teachers' shared belief in their collective capacity to improve student outcomes (Hsieh et al., 2025; Ağalday, 2025). By organising collaborative structures such as joint planning, lesson study and data dialogues, these leaders foster a culture of interdependence and mutual support. As collective efficacy grows, teachers are more likely to align themselves with school goals, experience a stronger sense of professional purpose and demonstrate higher levels of commitment.

Distributed leadership, in contrast, directly fosters teacher autonomy and professional collaboration by deliberately sharing leadership responsibilities across multiple actors in the school (Lee et al., 2021). Rather than centralising authority in the principal alone,

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distributed leadership empowers teachers and middle leaders to take ownership of instructional initiatives, lead working groups, and contribute to strategic decision-making. This redistribution of influence signals trust in teachers' expertise and encourages them to exercise professional judgement in shaping teaching and learning. As a result, autonomy and collaboration become embedded in everyday school practice, enhancing workplace harmony by cultivating mutual respect, shared responsibility, and richer professional dialogue.

Transformational leadership further complements these approaches by enhancing affective and normative dimensions of teacher commitment through employee voice and empowerment (Ağalday, 2025; Lee et al., 2021). Transformational leaders articulate a compelling vision, model core values and actively encourage teachers to contribute ideas, question existing practices and participate in school improvement efforts. By recognising teachers' contributions and supporting their personal and professional growth, these leaders strengthen emotional attachment to the school (affective commitment) and reinforce a sense of moral obligation to remain and contribute (normative commitment). Across these leadership styles, workplace harmony is moderated by the degree to which leaders successfully balance clear instructional direction, shared influence and empowering relationships, thereby integrating efficacy, autonomy, collaboration, and voice into a coherent and supportive school culture.

School culture and national context play a pivotal role in shaping how leadership influences workplace harmony and teacher commitment. A collaborative school culture characterised by shared norms of cooperation, mutual support, and collective problem-solving strengthens the positive impact of leadership on both commitment and job satisfaction (Kaya et al., 2025; Selvitopu et al., 2025). In such cultures, leadership initiatives that promote joint planning, peer observation, and professional learning communities are more readily embraced, as they resonate with existing expectations of working together. At the same time, national cultural dimensions such as power distance and collectivism moderate the effectiveness of leadership practices; in collectivist and relatively higher power-distance contexts, the mediating role of workplace harmony tends to be stronger, as teachers place high value on group cohesion, respectful hierarchy and harmonious relationships (Kaya et al., 2025; Selvitopu et al., 2025).

Employee voice and empowerment further shape the extent to which leadership can cultivate harmony and sustain teacher commitment. Leadership that encourages participation, open communication, and constructive feedback creates space for employee voice, enabling teachers to express concerns, share

ideas and influence school decisions (Yazici et al., 2022; Gao et al., 2019). This openness fosters trust and psychological safety, which are essential ingredients of workplace harmony. Empowerment, operationalised through participative decision-making and meaningful autonomy over professional practice, reinforces these effects by signalling respect for teachers' expertise and judgement (Gao et al., 2019). When teachers feel that their voices are heard and their professional agency is supported, they are more likely to develop strong professional commitment and to contribute actively to building a positive and supportive school environment.

Taken together, the interplay between leadership style, school culture and national context is critical in determining how workplace harmony mediates the relationship between leadership and teacher commitment. Leadership approaches that prioritise collaboration, empowerment and cultural sensitivity are most effective, because they align instructional and transformational practices with the cultural and organisational realities of the school. In collaborative and collectivist settings, such approaches amplify the mediating role of workplace harmony, strengthening collective efficacy, trust and collegiality. Conversely, when leadership disregards cultural norms or undermines voice and autonomy, the potential of workplace harmony as a mediating mechanism is weakened. Context-responsive leadership that deliberately nurtures harmonious relationships, honours teacher agency and leverages local cultural strengths is therefore essential for sustaining high levels of teacher commitment and job satisfaction (Kaya et al., 2025; Selvitopu et al., 2025; Yazici et al., 2022; Gao et al., 2019).

## Gaps in the Literature and Directions for Future Research

### Cultural and Contextual Gaps

Current scholarship on instructional leadership, workplace harmony, and teacher commitment reveals substantial cultural and contextual gaps that limit the generalisability of existing models. Research remains sparse in Chinese high schools, rural and underdeveloped regions, and many non-Western contexts, where organisational structures, resource constraints, and cultural norms may differ markedly from those in which dominant theories were developed (Thien et al., 2024). Moreover, many conceptual frameworks are grounded primarily in Western assumptions about leadership, individualism, and organisational behaviour, which may not adequately capture local values such as relational obligation, communal harmony, and culturally embedded notions of authority and respect (Wei et al., 2018; Thien et al., 2023). These gaps highlight the need for more localised and contextually grounded studies that can refine or

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extend existing models to better reflect diverse educational settings.

From a methodological perspective, future research would benefit from the use of more advanced analytic approaches capable of capturing the complex mediation and moderation processes underlying the relationships between leadership, workplace harmony and teacher commitment. Multilevel modelling and structural equation modelling (SEM), including latent profile analysis and moderated mediation models, are particularly well suited to disentangling cross-level effects and examining how individual, team, and school-level variables interact over time (Tian et al., 2025; Bellibaş et al., 2024; Ertürk et al., 2025). In addition, mixed-methods and longitudinal designs are needed to illuminate dynamic and context-specific mediation pathways that cannot be fully understood through cross-sectional survey data alone (Hua et al., 2025; Wei et al., 2018). Such designs can capture changes in leadership practices, workplace harmony and commitment over time, while qualitative components can provide nuanced insights into how teachers experience and interpret these processes in their own contexts.

Emerging areas related to virtual leadership and technology integration also remain underexplored, despite their growing relevance in contemporary schooling. There is limited empirical evidence on how virtual instructional leadership, conducted through digital platforms and remote interactions, shapes different dimensions of teacher commitment; in such contexts, traditional constructs such as normative and continuance commitment may operate differently or be less salient (Awang et al., 2022; Goel, 2025; P. Liu, 2020). Similarly, hybrid models that combine AI-based tools and other digital technologies with relational leadership practices appear promising for enhancing data-informed decision-making, collaboration and support, yet their effects on workplace harmony and commitment are only beginning to be examined (Assayed et al., 2025; Awang et al., 2022). Addressing these gaps will require localised, context-sensitive research that employs advanced methodologies and systematically explore how emerging leadership models function in digital and virtual environments, thereby extending and refining current understandings of leadership, workplace harmony, and teacher commitment in schools.

## Conclusion

The collective body of evidence indicates that instructional leadership, when enacted through relational, collaborative, and context-sensitive approaches, exerts a powerful indirect influence on teacher commitment by cultivating a harmonious school environment (Cansoy et al., 2022; Hosseingholizadeh et al., 2023). Rather than

operating merely through top-down directives, effective leadership shapes the social and cultural conditions of the school, strengthening collective teacher efficacy, trust, meaningful collaboration, and the functioning of professional learning communities (Liu et al., 2024). These mediating mechanisms are empirically supported across diverse settings, but their strength and configuration vary according to cultural norms and contextual conditions (e.g., power distance and collectivism) as well as organisational characteristics (Hallinger et al., 2025). At the same time, emerging models that integrate digital tools, artificial intelligence, and virtual leadership add both complexity and promise, suggesting new pathways for cultivating harmony and commitment while underscoring the need for careful, context-aware implementation in rapidly changing educational environments (Pashmforoosh et al., 2023; Pietsch et al., 2025; Wollscheid et al., 2025).

The findings carry important practical implications for school leaders and policymakers. For school leaders, the evidence points to the importance of prioritising relational and collaborative leadership practices over purely managerial or compliance-driven approaches, including strengthening professional learning communities, creating structures for joint work on instructional improvement, nurturing trust and collegiality, and calibrating leadership strategies to local cultural expectations and organisational realities (Liu et al., 2024). For policymakers, there is a clear rationale to design and support leadership development programmes that explicitly emphasise collective capacity-building and context-sensitive practice, rather than focusing narrowly on accountability metrics or technical management skills; such support can enable school leaders to invest sustained time and resources in the relational infrastructure that underpins teacher commitment and school effectiveness (Cansoy et al., 2022; Hosseingholizadeh et al., 2023).

For researchers, the documented complexity of these relationships highlights the need for more sophisticated and contextually grounded research agendas. In particular, advanced multilevel and structural equation modelling—including moderated mediation designs—are increasingly necessary to capture cross-level dynamics and unpack how leadership, workplace harmony, and commitment processes interact (Liu et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025). Future studies should also prioritise underrepresented contexts such as non-Western systems, rural and under-resourced schools, and rapidly digitising environments to refine and localise existing theoretical models (Hallinger et al., 2025; Wollscheid et al., 2025). In addition, there is substantial scope for investigating how digital and AI-enabled leadership practices integrate with established relational approaches, particularly regarding their implications for organisational harmony, staff well-being, and

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enduring professional commitment (Pietsch et al., 2025). Together, these directions can contribute to a more nuanced, globally relevant understanding of how instructional leadership can sustainably build harmonious workplaces and enduring teacher commitment.

### Suggested Further Research

Future research should prioritise localised, context-sensitive studies that deepen understanding of how instructional leadership and workplace harmony operate in underrepresented settings. In particular, in-depth investigations in Chinese high schools, rural schools, and underdeveloped regions are needed to illuminate how cultural norms, resource constraints and community expectations shape the pathways from leadership practices to workplace harmony, and teacher commitment. Such studies can help refine existing theoretical models by revealing context-specific mechanisms and adaptations that are not visible in research conducted predominantly in urban, well-resourced, or Western environments.

Methodologically, longitudinal and mixed-methods designs are essential for capturing the dynamic nature of workplace harmony as a mediating process. Longitudinal studies can trace how changes in leadership practices, school culture and external conditions influence workplace harmony and teacher commitment over time, thereby moving beyond the static snapshots provided by cross-sectional surveys. Mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative modelling with qualitative interviews, observations, and document analysis would provide richer insights into how teachers experience and interpret leadership, harmony and commitment in their daily work. This combination can uncover nuanced processes, feedback loops, and critical incidents that are difficult to detect using a single method alone.

Given the rapid digitalisation of education, future research should also focus on virtual and AI-integrated leadership models, alongside cross-cultural field experiments. Empirical studies are needed to examine how digital tools, AI-based analytics and virtual forms of instructional leadership affect workplace harmony, teacher well-being, and different dimensions of teacher commitment, including whether traditional constructs of commitment require reconsideration in virtual or hybrid environments. Cross-cultural field experiments that test the efficacy of hybrid leadership models combining relational, distributed, and technology-enhanced practices in diverse educational systems would further clarify what works, for whom, and under what conditions. Together, these lines of inquiry can advance a more robust and globally relevant evidence base to guide leadership practice in increasingly complex, diverse, and digitised school contexts.

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