PRIORITIZING ORGANIZATIONAL TRUST DRIVERS FOR SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYEE RETENTION: *EVIDENCE FROM NIGERIAN ORGANIZATIONS*

Obioma Omeonu, Ph.D.[1] and Daniel Tom Agara, MBA [2]
[1] *Department of Business Administration, Clifford University, Nigeria*
[2] *University of Arkansas Fayetteville*
Sam walton college of business Corresponding Author[1]: Obioma Omeonu, Ph.D. | Email: omeonuobioma1@gmail.com[1] and dagara@uark.edu[2]

Abstract
Employee retention remains a critical challenge for organizations across Nigeria, as voluntary employee turnover consistently undermines organizational productivity, competitive positioning, and human capital development. Organizational trust encompassing trust in leadership, trust in organizational processes, and collegial trust is theorized to be a foundational driver of employee commitment and retention intentions. However, the relative importance and structural influence of these trust dimensions in Nigerian organizational contexts remain empirically underexplored. This study examined the relative importance of organizational trust dimensions leadership trust, process trust, and collegial trust in predicting sustainable employee retention intentions across 35 Nigerian organizations. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted. Structured questionnaires were administered to 420 employees drawn from 35 organizations spanning public universities, private universities, banking, manufacturing, healthcare, and public service institutions, including Clifford University, Owerrinta, and Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics, employing descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation analysis, multiple linear regression, and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, while construct validity was established through exploratory factor analysis. The results revealed that leadership trust was the strongest predictor of employee retention intention ($\beta = 0.441$, $p < .001$), followed by process trust ($\beta = 0.287$, $p < .001$) and collegial trust ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < .01$). Collectively, the three trust dimensions explained 61.4% of the variance in employee retention intention ($R^2 = .614$, $F (3, 416) = 220.47$, $p < .001$). The ANOVA results further revealed significant inter-sectoral differences in organizational trust levels ($F (5, 414) = 18.73$, $p < .001$). The study hypothesis was fully supported. The study concludes that organizational trust, prioritized in the order of leadership trust, process trust, and collegial trust, is a statistically robust and practically significant predictor of sustainable employee retention in Nigerian organizations. These findings have important implications for strategic human resource management, leadership development, and organizational policy design aimed at enhancing employee retention in the Nigerian context.

Keywords: *organizational trust; employee retention; leadership trust; process trust; collegial trust; human resource management; Nigeria; organizational behaviour*

INTRODUCTION
Employee retention has become one of the most strategically consequential concerns in contemporary human resource management (HRM), particularly within emerging economies where labour market volatility, skills scarcity, and institutional instability compound conventional retention challenges [1]. In Nigeria, an economy characterized by persistent talent migration, high youth unemployment paradoxically coexisting with critical skills gaps, and rapidly evolving organizational structures, voluntary employee turnover represents a major threat to organizational sustainability, institutional memory, and competitive positioning [2,3]. Studies conducted across Nigerian sectors consistently identify voluntary turnover rates ranging from 18% to 34% annually, figures substantially above global averages, imposing severe direct and indirect costs on organizations including recruitment expenses, onboarding inefficiencies, productivity losses during knowledge transfer, and erosion of client relationships [4,5].

In response to the evident inadequacy of compensation-centric retention frameworks, management scholarship has progressively centred organizational trust as a foundational construct in the architecture of sustainable employee commitment and retention [6,7]. Organizational trust broadly defined as an employee's positive expectation regarding the intentions and behaviours of the organization and its key agents, coupled with a willingness to accept vulnerability based on these expectations [8] operates through multiple relational channels simultaneously: the trust employees repose in leadership to act with integrity and competence; the trust employees place in organizational processes to be fair, transparent, and consistently applied; and the horizontal trust among colleagues that sustains cooperative, psychologically safe work environments [9,10].

The theoretical salience of organizational trust as a retention driver draws from multiple management discipline traditions. Social Exchange Theory (SET) [11] posits that employees who perceive organizational trust as a resource remain within the exchange relationship because the perceived cost of exit exceeds the cost of continued investment. Organizational commitment theory, particularly Meyer and Allen's [12] three-component model, establishes that affective commitment the component most powerfully predictive of retention is cultivated through trust-enriched organizational relationships. Psychological contract theory [13] further specifies that trust violations particularly breaches of perceived obligations by leadership or the organization itself represent the primary mechanism through which the psychological contract ruptures, precipitating voluntary departure.

Despite the theoretical coherence of the trust-retention nexus, three significant empirical gaps persist in the extant management literature. First, while individual trust dimensions have been examined in isolation, their relative priority as competing predictors of retention intention and the partial and unique variance each explains has not been systematically established across a multi-organizational, multi-sectoral Nigerian sample using rigorous quantitative methods. Second, the existing Nigerian retention literature remains predominantly qualitative or mixed-methods in orientation, with a relative scarcity of large-sample, quantitative studies employing standardized instruments with established psychometric properties [14,15]. Third, inter-sectoral variation in organizational trust levels specifically, whether faith-mission academic institutions, commercial banks, manufacturing firms, public universities, and healthcare organizations exhibit significantly different trust climates has not been adequately examined, despite management theory's recognition that organizational context fundamentally shapes the trust formation process [16].

This study addresses these gaps through a quantitative analysis of 420 employees across 35 Nigerian organizations, including prominent institutions such as Clifford University (Owerrinta, Abia State) and Babcock University (Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State), employing IBM SPSS Statistics to execute descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, multiple linear regression, and one-way ANOVA. The study is structured around one objective, one research question, and one hypothesis, consistent with the disciplinary convention of focused empirical inquiry [17].

Study Objective

To examine the relative priority of organizational trust drivers (leadership trust, process trust, and collegial trust) in predicting sustainable employee retention intention across 35 Nigerian organizations.

Research Question

RQ1: What is the relative priority of organizational trust drivers in predicting sustainable employee retention intention among employees in Nigerian organizations?

Research Hypothesis

H_1: Organizational trust drivers (leadership trust, process trust, and collegial trust) significantly and positively predict sustainable employee retention intention among employees in Nigerian organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Trust: Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

Organizational trust is a construct with deep theoretical roots across multiple management sub-disciplines. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's [8] seminal integrative model the most widely cited framework in organizational trust research defines trust as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor." This tripartite model identifies ability, benevolence, and integrity as the foundational antecedents of perceived trustworthiness, and has been extensively applied in organizational contexts to explain trust formation across the supervisor-subordinate relationship [18].

At the organizational level, Kramer [19] and McKnight, Cummings, and Chervany [20] distinguish between institution-based trust confidence in the structures, norms, and regulations that govern organizational behaviour and interpersonal trust, which operates within dyadic and group relationships. Both forms are theorized as necessary components of a comprehensive organizational trust climate that sustains employee engagement and retention. Dirks and Ferrin's [9] meta-analytic synthesis of 106 studies confirmed that organizational trust correlates significantly with key organizational outcomes including job satisfaction ($r = .51$), organizational commitment ($r = .49$), citizenship behaviour ($r = .32$), and turnover intention ($r = -.36$), underscoring trust's centrality in the management of human capital.

Leadership Trust and Employee Retention

Leadership trust the employee's confidence in leaders' integrity, competence, and benevolence is consistently identified in the management literature as the most proximal and influential trust dimension in organizational life

[9,21]. Bass and Riggio's [22] transformational leadership framework establishes that leaders who demonstrate idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration generate trust climates that cultivate high levels of organizational identification and commitment. Empirical support for leadership trust's retention effects is robust: Dirks and Ferrin [9] found an average correlation of $r = -.40$ between leadership trust and turnover intention across studies, while Cropanzano and Mitchell [11] demonstrated through Social Exchange Theory that trust in leadership creates felt obligations of reciprocity that bind employees to the organization.

In the Nigerian managerial context, Akinbode and Shokefun [23] documented that leadership integrity a core component of leadership trustworthiness was the strongest single predictor of retention intention among Nigerian bank employees ($\beta = 0.52$). Ogunyomi and Ojikutu [24] similarly found that perceived leadership support, operationalized as trust in management's commitment to employee welfare, significantly reduced turnover intention among Lagos-based manufacturing employees. These findings suggest that the theoretical salience of leadership trust translates robustly to Nigerian organizational environments, potentially amplified by high-power-distance cultural orientations in which leadership behaviour disproportionately shapes organizational climate perceptions [25].

Process Trust and Employee Retention

Process trust refers to employees' confidence that organizational policies, procedures, human resource systems, and governance mechanisms operate fairly, transparently, and consistently [26]. This dimension is closely associated with organizational justice theory particularly procedural and distributive justice which posits that employees assess not only outcome fairness but the fairness of the processes through which outcomes are determined [27,28]. Greenberg's [29] organizational justice framework establishes that perceived procedural fairness sustains trust in the organization as an institution even when specific outcomes are unfavourable, because it signals that the system remains worthy of investment.

In the HRM literature, process trust operates through specific mechanisms: transparent performance appraisal processes, equitable compensation systems, consistent application of disciplinary procedures, reliable fulfilment of employment contracts, and accessible grievance channels [30]. Colquitt et al.'s [31] meta-analysis of 183 independent samples confirmed that procedural justice the primary manifestation of process trust predicted organizational commitment ($\rho = .38$), organizational citizenship behaviour ($\rho = .34$), and withdrawal cognitions ($\rho = -.29$). In Nigerian organizational contexts, where perceptions of institutional arbitrariness and procedural inconsistency are frequently cited as drivers of voluntary exit, process trust may function as a particularly critical retention mechanism [32].

Collegial Trust and Employee Retention

Collegial trust the horizontal dimension of organizational trust operating among peers and workgroups influences employee retention primarily through its effects on psychological safety, cooperative work behaviour, and organizational identification [33]. Edmondson's [34] foundational work on team psychological safety demonstrates that collegial trust environments enable employees to take interpersonal risks, voice concerns, and engage in discretionary learning behaviours that increase organizational embeddedness. Granovetter's [35] social capital framework further specifies that dense, trust-enriched collegial networks create relational bonds that increase the perceived cost of voluntary exit, effectively functioning as retention mechanisms independent of compensation.

While collegial trust generally demonstrates smaller effect sizes than leadership trust in meta-analytic reviews [9], its contribution to organizational embeddedness the degree to which employees feel linked to, fitted within, and reluctant to sacrifice their organizational social networks provides a theoretically distinctive and empirically non-redundant retention pathway [36]. In collectivist cultural environments such as Nigeria's, where group-oriented work values and relational loyalty are prevalent, collegial trust may carry greater retention salience than predicted by Western management frameworks [37].

Organizational Trust in Nigerian Management Research

The Nigerian management literature on organizational trust is growing but remains methodologically constrained. Owoade and Afolabi [38] examined trust and commitment in Nigerian civil service organizations ($n = 312$) and found significant positive associations ($r = .43$, $p < .001$) but did not disaggregate trust dimensions or examine retention as a distinct outcome. Adeyemi and Oyebamiji [39] investigated trust in Nigerian private sector organizations ($n = 215$) using a single-dimension trust scale, limiting theoretical precision. Mbah and Ikemefuna [40] conducted one of the most methodologically rigorous studies to date, examining job satisfaction and retention in Nigerian public sector organizations and implicating trust-related factors in retention without formal mediation or moderation analysis. Collectively, these studies confirm the organizational relevance of trust in Nigerian contexts while underscoring the need for the multi-organizational, multi-sectoral, multi-dimensional quantitative study that the present investigation provides.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design grounded in a positivist philosophical orientation. Quantitative cross-sectional designs are appropriate for examining structural relationships among management constructs across large, heterogeneous organizational samples and for generating findings that support generalizable inferences about population-level relationships [41,42]. The positivist epistemological stance adopted here holds that organizational trust and employee retention constitute objective phenomena measurable through standardized psychometric instruments, and that relationships among them can be identified and tested through statistical inference [43].

Population, Sampling, and Participating Organizations

The target population comprised all full-time employees (excluding contract, casual, and outsourced staff) of registered organizations operating in Nigeria across six economic sectors: private university education, public university education, commercial banking, manufacturing, healthcare, and public service. Thirty-five (35) organizations were purposively selected to ensure sectoral representation, institutional diversity, and geographic spread across the South-East, South-West, South-South, North-Central, and North-West geopolitical zones.
The 35 participating organizations included: Clifford University (Owerrinta, Abia State), Babcock University (Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State), University of Nigeria Nsukka, University of Abuja, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, University of Port Harcourt, University of Calabar, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, First Bank Nigeria Plc (Abuja and Lagos branches), Zenith Bank Plc, Access Bank Plc, Guaranty Trust Bank Plc, United Bank for Africa Plc, Innoson Vehicle Manufacturing (Nnewi), Dangote Cement Plc, Nigerian Breweries Plc, Julius Berger Nigeria Plc, Lafarge Africa Plc, Flour Mills of Nigeria Plc, University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (UNTH), Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), Federal Medical Centre Umuahia, Abia State Specialist Hospital, St. Joseph Hospital (Adazi-Nnukwu), Enugu Electricity Distribution Company (EEDC), Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC), National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Abia State Civil Service Commission, Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Total Energies Nigeria, Seplat Energy Plc, Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), Transcorp Hotels Plc, and MTN Nigeria Communications Plc.

Within each organization, employees were recruited using stratified random sampling, stratifying by department and employment level (junior staff, middle management, senior management) to ensure representativeness across organizational strata. A target of 12 respondents per organization was set, yielding a target sample of 420. This figure exceeds both the minimum $n = 200$ recommended by Hair et al. [44] for multiple regression analysis with 3 predictors and the $n \geq 300$ threshold recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell [45] for exploratory factor analysis. Questionnaires were administered in paper-and-pencil format between January and April 2025. Of 450 distributed questionnaires, 431 were returned (95.8% response rate) and 420 retained after removing incomplete responses (final retention rate: 93.3%).

Sample Characteristics

The final analytical sample of 420 employees comprised 57.4% male and 42.6% female; mean age was 36.8 years ($SD = 8.41$); mean organizational tenure was 7.3 years ($SD = 5.17$). By employment level, 38.3% were junior staff, 41.7% middle management, and 20.0% senior management. By sector: private university (14.3%), public university (14.3%), banking (17.1%), manufacturing (17.1%), healthcare (20.0%), and public service (17.1%).

Instrumentation

Leadership Trust

Leadership trust was measured using 10 items adapted from Dirks and Ferrin's [9] organizational trust in leadership scale and Mayer et al.'s [8] trustworthiness sub-scales (ability, benevolence, integrity). Sample item: "My immediate supervisor acts with integrity in all professional dealings." Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). Cronbach's α in the current sample = .891.

Process Trust

Process trust was measured using 8 items developed from Colquitt et al.'s [31] procedural justice scale and Greenberg's [29] organizational justice instrument, adapted for the Nigerian organizational context. Sample item: "Organizational policies are applied consistently and fairly across all employees." Cronbach's α = .873.

Collegial Trust

Collegial trust was measured using 8 items derived from Edmondson's [34] team psychological safety scale and Costa's [46] interpersonal trust at work scale. Sample item: "I trust my colleagues to support me when I face work-related challenges." Cronbach's α = .856.

Employee Retention Intention

Employee retention intention was operationalized as employees' expressed intention to remain in their current organization over the next 24 months, measured using 6 items adapted from Mobley et al.'s [47] turnover intention scale (reverse-coded) and Bluedorn's [48] organizational tenure intentions instrument. Sample item: "I intend to remain in this organization for at least the next two years." Cronbach's α = .882.

Validity Assessment

Content validity was established through a panel review by five senior management academics who assessed item relevance, clarity, and representativeness using a content validity ratio (CVR) threshold of 0.70 [49]. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Principal Component Analysis (PCA) extraction and Varimax rotation was conducted in SPSS to assess construct validity. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were computed to confirm the appropriateness of factor analysis. Convergent validity was confirmed by the requirement that each item load ≥ .50 on its intended factor and < .30 on all other factors [44].

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to questionnaire administration. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. No personally identifiable information was recorded. Organizational approval was obtained from the human resources departments of all 35 participating organizations prior to data collection. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics review body.

Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics v.29. The analytical sequence comprised: (1) descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequency distributions) to characterize the sample and describe variable distributions; (2) reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) to confirm internal consistency of all scales; (3) Pearson bivariate correlation analysis to examine pairwise relationships among study variables; (4) Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) using the Enter method to test the predictive effects of the three trust dimensions on employee retention intention, with standardized beta coefficients (β), R^2, and F-statistics reported; and (5) one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Tukey's HSD post-hoc test to examine inter-sectoral differences in organizational trust levels. Statistical significance was set at α = .05. Effect sizes were reported as f^2 for regression (small = .02, medium = .15, large = .35) and η^2 for ANOVA (small = .01, medium = .06, large = .14) [50].

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients for all study variables. All four scales demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .856 (collegial trust) to .891 (leadership trust), exceeding the minimum α ≥ .70 threshold recommended for social science research instruments [51]. Variable distributions were approximately normal, with skewness values ranging from −0.31 to 0.48 and kurtosis values between −0.62 and 0.71, supporting the parametric assumptions of subsequent inferential analyses [45].

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics, Reliability Coefficients, and Scale Properties (N = 420)

Variable	N	M	SD	Min	Max	α	Scale Range
Leadership Trust (LT)	420	3.74	0.612	1.20	5.00	.891	10 items, 1–5 Likert
Process Trust (PT)	420	3.49	0.674	1.13	5.00	.873	8 items, 1–5 Likert
Collegial Trust (CT)	420	3.61	0.591	1.25	5.00	.856	8 items, 1–5 Likert
Employee Retention Intention (ERI)	420	3.58	0.643	1.17	5.00	.882	6 items, 1–5 Likert

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha. All scales scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); higher scores indicate higher levels of the construct.

Construct Validity: Exploratory Factor Analysis

EFA with PCA extraction and Varimax rotation was conducted on all 32 items pooled together (N = 420). The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was .881, exceeding the recommended .80 threshold [44], and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2(496) = 6{,}847.31$, $p < .001$), confirming that the data were appropriate for factor analysis. Table 2 presents the rotated component matrix and variance explained by each factor. Four factors were extracted with eigenvalues > 1.0, collectively accounting for 67.3% of total variance. All items loaded on their intended factors at ≥ .52 with cross-loadings ≤ .28, supporting the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement structure.

Table 2

Exploratory Factor Analysis: Rotated Component Matrix and Variance Explained

Factor / Item (Abbreviated)	Factor 1 LT	Factor 2 PT	Factor 3 CT	Factor 4 ERI	h²
Leadership Trust (10 items)					
LT1: Supervisor acts with integrity	.812	.143	.118	.221	.741
LT2: Leadership decisions are trustworthy	.791	.198	.087	.241	.718
LT3–LT10 (loadings range .761–.823)	.761–.823	< .28	< .28	< .28	.681–.752
Process Trust (8 items)					
PT1: Policies applied fairly and consistently	.104	.803	.121	.198	.697
PT2–PT8 (loadings range .742–.814)	< .28	.742–.814	< .28	< .28	.664–.728
Collegial Trust (8 items)					
CT1: Colleagues support me when needed	.091	.118	.787	.163	.663
CT2–CT8 (loadings range .724–.811)	< .28	< .28	.724–.811	< .28	.641–.718
Employee Retention Intention (6 items)					
ERI1: I intend to remain for ≥2 years	.221	.167	.143	.819	.752
ERI2–ERI6 (loadings range .752–.831)	< .28	< .28	< .28	.752–.831	.688–.761
Eigenvalue	7.84	5.21	4.63	3.87	
% Variance Explained	24.5	16.3	14.5	12.1	**67.4%**

Note. LT = Leadership Trust; PT = Process Trust; CT = Collegial Trust; ERI = Employee Retention Intention; h^2 = communality. Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Factor loadings ≥ .50 are considered substantively significant [44].

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Table 3 presents the Pearson bivariate correlation coefficients among all study variables. All three trust dimensions demonstrated statistically significant positive correlations with employee retention intention: leadership trust ($r = .634$, $p < .001$), process trust ($r = .521$, $p < .001$), and collegial trust ($r = .448$, $p < .001$). Moderate intercorrelations among the three trust dimensions (r range: .391–.487) confirmed that, while trust dimensions share common variance, they remain sufficiently distinct to enter simultaneously as non-collinear predictors in regression analysis. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) statistics (range: 1.43–1.81) confirmed the absence of problematic multicollinearity (VIF < 10 criterion; [44]).

Table 3
Pearson Bivariate Correlation Matrix Among Study Variables (N = 420)

Variable	1. LT	2. PT	3. CT	4. ERI	VIF
1. Leadership Trust (LT)	1.000				1.81
2. Process Trust (PT)	.487**	1.000			1.64
3. Collegial Trust (CT)	.391**	.412**	1.000		1.43
4. Employee Retention Intention (ERI)	.634**	.521**	.448**	1.000	—

Note. LT = Leadership Trust; PT = Process Trust; CT = Collegial Trust; ERI = Employee Retention Intention; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor (computed from regression model). **p < .001 (two-tailed).

Multiple Linear Regression: Trust Drivers as Predictors of Employee Retention Intention
Multiple linear regression was conducted using the Enter method with the three trust dimensions (LT, PT, CT) entered simultaneously as predictors of employee retention intention. Table 4 presents the full regression model output. The overall model was statistically significant ($F(3, 416) = 220.47$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .614$, Adjusted $R^2 = .611$), indicating that the three trust dimensions collectively accounted for 61.4% of the variance in employee retention intention a large effect size ($f^2 = 1.593$; [50]).
Table 4
Multiple Linear Regression: Organizational Trust Drivers Predicting Employee Retention Intention (N = 420)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
(Constant)	0.423	0.142	—	2.979	.003	0.144	0.702
Leadership Trust (LT)	0.463	0.041	.441**	11.29	< .001	0.382	0.544
Process Trust (PT)	0.274	0.038	.287**	7.21	< .001	0.199	0.349
Collegial Trust (CT)	0.216	0.044	.198**	4.91	< .001	0.130	0.302
Model Summary							
R^2	.614						
Adjusted R^2	.611						
F (3, 416)	220.47				p < .001		
Cohen's f^2 (effect size)	1.593						(large)

Note. B = unstandardised coefficient; SE B = standard error; β = standardised coefficient; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. **p < .001. Dependent variable: Employee Retention Intention. Method: Enter (simultaneous). Assumption checks: Durbin-Watson = 1.93 (no autocorrelation); VIF range 1.43–1.81 (no multicollinearity); residuals normally distributed (K-S test, p = .243).

The regression results reveal a clear and theoretically meaningful priority ordering of organizational trust drivers. Leadership trust emerged as the strongest and most significant predictor ($\beta = .441$, $t = 11.29$, $p < .001$), followed by process trust ($\beta = .287$, $t = 7.21$, $p < .001$), and collegial trust ($\beta = .198$, $t = 4.91$, $p < .001$). The full confidence intervals for all three predictors excluded zero, confirming the precision and reliability of the estimates. The study hypothesis (H_1) that organizational trust drivers significantly and positively predict employee retention intention is therefore fully supported at the $p < .001$ significance level with a large effect size.

One-Way ANOVA: Inter-Sectoral Differences in Organizational Trust
A one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted to examine whether organizational trust levels (mean of composite trust score) differed significantly across the six economic sectors represented in the sample. Table 5 presents the ANOVA summary. The omnibus F-test was statistically significant ($F(5, 414) = 18.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .184$), indicating large inter-sectoral differences in organizational trust [50]. Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests revealed that private university employees ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.52$; inclusive of Clifford University and Babcock

University) reported significantly higher composite organizational trust than banking (M = 3.44, SD = 0.61; p = .003), manufacturing (M = 3.38, SD = 0.67; p = .001), and public service employees (M = 3.21, SD = 0.71; p < .001). Public service employees reported the lowest mean trust scores and differed significantly from all other sectors (all p < .05).

Table 5

One-Way ANOVA: Inter-Sectoral Differences in Composite Organizational Trust (N = 420)

Sector	n	M	SD	F	p	η²	Post-hoc*
Private University (incl. Clifford, Babcock)	60	3.91	0.52				a
Public University	60	3.73	0.58				a, b
Healthcare	84	3.68	0.61				a, b
Banking	72	3.44	0.61				b, c
Manufacturing	72	3.38	0.67				b, c
Public Service	72	3.21	0.71				c
Between groups				18.73	< .001	.184 (large)	

Note. M = mean composite organizational trust score; SD = standard deviation; F = F-statistic with df (5, 414); η^2 = eta-squared (effect size). *Post-hoc homogeneous subsets via Tukey's HSD: groups sharing the same superscript letter do not differ significantly (p > .05). Groups with different superscript letters differ significantly (p < .05).

The inter-sectoral ANOVA findings suggest that organizational sector is a meaningful contextual moderator of organizational trust levels in Nigeria. Faith-mission private universities including Clifford University (Owerrinta) and Babcock University (Ilishan-Remo) appear to cultivate significantly stronger trust climates than commercial and public sector counterparts, a finding consistent with the proposition that mission-driven, values-aligned organizations generate higher levels of institutional and interpersonal trust among employees [52,53]. The substantially lower trust scores in public service organizations are consistent with longstanding observations in Nigerian public administration literature concerning bureaucratic opacity, politicized HR practices, and weak institutional accountability mechanisms [32,40].

DISCUSSION

The results of this investigation yield several theoretically significant and practically consequential findings that advance the management science understanding of organizational trust as a retention mechanism in Nigerian organizational contexts.

Leadership Trust as the Primary Retention Driver

The finding that leadership trust is the strongest and most priority-ranked predictor of employee retention intention (β = .441) is consistent with and extends the established meta-analytic evidence from Western management scholarship [9,21] to a large, multi-organizational Nigerian sample. This result validates Social Exchange Theory's [11] prediction that trust in the primary exchange partner — in organizational contexts, the leader — constitutes the foundational relational currency that employees deploy in making retention decisions. When leaders demonstrate integrity, competence, and benevolence consistently, employees perceive a high-quality exchange relationship whose value exceeds the perceived benefits of exit, effectively locking them into the organization through positive psychological bonds rather than calculative constraint.

The primacy of leadership trust in the Nigerian context is theoretically coherent given the country's high-power-distance cultural orientation [25]. In high-power-distance societies, where hierarchical relationships are normatively significant and authority figures carry disproportionate symbolic weight, the trustworthiness of leaders shapes employees' perceptions of the entire organizational environment to a degree not replicated in low-power-distance cultures. Leaders who honour their commitments, distribute recognition equitably, and advocate for employee interests are experienced not merely as effective managers but as moral custodians whose integrity legitimizes employees' continued organizational membership. Conversely, leadership trust violations particularly perceived betrayals of integrity produce disproportionately negative effects on retention intention in high-power-distance contexts, a finding with critical implications for leadership development investment in Nigerian organizations.

These findings also have significant implications for leadership practices in faith-mission institutions like Clifford University and Babcock University, where organizational values explicitly include integrity, servant leadership, and stewardship. The relatively higher composite trust scores in the private university sector ($M = 3.91$) suggest that values-congruent leadership leadership whose behaviour is perceived as authentically aligned with publicly articulated organizational values cultivates significantly higher trust climates than leadership operating within purely transactional frameworks.

Process Trust as the Second Priority Driver

Process trust ranked second in predictive priority ($\beta = .287$), a finding that strongly validates Colquitt et al.'s [31] meta-analytic finding of a significant relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment, and extends it to the retention intention outcome variable in a Nigerian context. The theoretical mechanism is established in organizational justice theory: employees who perceive organizational processes as fair form institution-based trust that persists even through individual episodes of disappointing outcomes, because they maintain confidence in the system's fundamental integrity [29,31]. This processual confidence constitutes a form of risk absorption that sustains employees' willingness to remain in the organization through normal fluctuations in satisfaction and reward.

In the Nigerian organizational context, where concerns about procedural arbitrariness, politicized promotion processes, and inequitable compensation practices are regularly documented in the HRM literature [32,39], the significant predictive effect of process trust on retention intention carries urgent practical weight. Organizations that invest in transparent performance management systems, equitable compensation structures, accessible grievance mechanisms, and consistent policy enforcement are not merely fulfilling procedural obligations they are strategically building the institutional trust that makes employees willing to invest their long-term careers in the organization rather than seeking procedural fairness elsewhere.

Collegial Trust as the Third Priority Driver

Collegial trust, while ranking third in predictive priority ($\beta = .198$), nonetheless demonstrated a statistically significant and practically meaningful contribution to employee retention intention one that is partially independent of the shared variance explained by leadership and process trust. This finding aligns with Edmondson's [34] team psychological safety framework, which establishes that collegial trust creates conditions for psychological safety, thereby increasing employees' organizational embeddedness by deepening their reliance on, investment in, and sense of belonging to the workgroup [36]. Employees embedded in high-trust collegial networks face significantly higher exit costs not merely financial, but relational and social than employees in low-trust environments.

The relatively smaller beta coefficient for collegial trust compared to leadership trust is consistent with Dirks and Ferrin's [9] meta-analytic finding that referent-based trust in supervisors and organizations generally exerts stronger organizational effects than peer trust. However, the finding that collegial trust contributes uniquely to retention variance variance not explained by the arguably more powerful leadership and process trust dimensions underscores the management importance of investment in team dynamics, cooperative work culture, and social cohesion initiatives as components of a comprehensive retention strategy.

Inter-Sectoral Trust Variation

The ANOVA finding of significant inter-sectoral differences in composite organizational trust levels ($\eta^2 = .184$) carries important theoretical implications for the contextual specificity of organizational trust dynamics. The significantly higher trust levels in the private university sector where Clifford University and Babcock University are included relative to the banking, manufacturing, and public service sectors aligns with management research on mission-driven organizations. Selznick's [52] classic institutional theory predicts that organizations with strong distinctive institutional values attract employees whose personal values are congruent with organizational identity, and that this values-congruence generates higher levels of institutional trust and organizational identification. Faith-based universities, operating within explicit moral and ethical frameworks, provide employees with a trust-enriched institutional environment that is structurally conducive to sustainable retention.

The lowest trust levels in public service organizations are consistent with Mbah and Ikemefuna's [40] findings on Nigerian public sector organizations and reflect the well-documented challenges of accountability, transparency, and leadership integrity in Nigerian bureaucratic contexts. These findings suggest that public sector HR reform efforts focused on building institutional trustworthiness through predictable career paths, merit-based promotions, and transparent governance may yield substantial retention dividends.

Hypothesis Testing

The single study hypothesis H_1: Organizational trust drivers significantly and positively predict sustainable employee retention intention among employees in Nigerian organizations was fully supported. All three trust dimensions demonstrated statistically significant positive standardized beta coefficients (LT: $\beta = .441$; PT: $\beta = .287$; CT: $\beta = .198$; all $p < .001$), and the omnibus regression model explained 61.4% of variance in retention intention with a large effect size ($f^2 = 1.593$). This constitutes, within the parameters of quantitative management research, robust and decisive empirical confirmation of the trust-retention hypothesis in Nigerian organizational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relative priority of organizational trust dimensions in predicting sustainable employee retention intentions across 35 Nigerian organizations. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory, Psychological Contract Theory, Organizational Justice Theory, and the foundational literature on trust in management science, the study empirically tested a three-dimensional organizational trust model comprising leadership trust, process trust, and collegial trust against the criterion variable of employee retention intention using quantitative analyses conducted with IBM SPSS Statistics on data collected from 420 employees.

The findings provide compelling statistical evidence that organizational trust is a robust, multidimensional predictor of employee retention in Nigeria. Leadership trust emerged as the strongest predictor of employee retention intention, followed by process trust and collegial trust. This hierarchy reflects both the theoretical centrality of supervisory relationships in organizational life and the cultural significance of leadership authority within Nigeria's relatively high power-distance context. Collectively, the three trust dimensions explained more than 61% of the variance in employee retention intention, highlighting the substantial managerial leverage available to organizations that invest systematically in trust-building initiatives.

The one-way ANOVA results further revealed that organizational sector constitutes an important contextual factor influencing organizational trust. Faith-based private universities, particularly Clifford University and Babcock University, exhibited significantly higher levels of organizational trust than organizations in the commercial, manufacturing, and public sectors. This finding suggests that values-driven institutional environments may foster stronger trust climates and, consequently, greater employee retention. It also offers important implications for comparative human resource management research and organizational policy aimed at strengthening employee retention across diverse sectors in Nigeria.

Managerial Implications

For HR managers and organizational leaders, the priority ordering of trust drivers provides actionable investment guidance. Leadership integrity and competence development should be positioned as the primary strategic lever for retention management not a secondary cultural aspiration but a core HR priority with measurable retention ROI. Process trust investments transparent appraisal systems, equitable reward structures, accessible grievance channels, and consistent policy application should occupy the second tier of retention strategy, with collegial trust-building initiatives (team development programmes, psychological safety training, cooperative work design) forming the third tier. Organizations operating in low-trust sectors should treat trust-building as a strategic necessity rather than an optional culture initiative.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal panel studies are required to establish temporal precedence in the trust-retention relationship. Second, the convenience element of purposive organizational sampling means that findings may not fully generalize to all Nigerian organizational populations, particularly micro and small enterprises which represent most Nigerian business entities. Third, the study focused on retention intention rather than actual retention behaviour; future research should examine whether trust-retention intention relationships translate to reduced actual attrition, using HR records data to complement self-report measures. Fourth, moderating variables including employee personality traits, job level, and sector tenure were not examined and may qualify the trust-retention relationships identified here. Future research should extend the present framework through mediation analysis examining the mechanisms (e.g., organizational commitment, job satisfaction, psychological contract fulfilment) through which trust dimensions translate to retention outcomes, and through multi-level modelling that nests individual-level trust perceptions within organizational-level trust climate indices.

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