

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Leadership styles and organizational commitment: a test on Malaysia manufacturing industry

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It has become clear that organizational commitment (OC) has important implications for employees and organizations as confirmed by past researchers. This study examines leadership styles and employees' organizational commitment in the Malaysia context. Two types of leadership styles namely transformational and transactional leadership styles have been chosen as focus of research to investigate the impact on organizational commitment. This is imperative in order to ensure the successful management of employees and also to improve productivity and achievements of an organization. One hundred and fifty-six Malaysian executives voluntarily participated in this study. The results have indicated that several dimensions of transactional and transformational leadership have positive relationship with organizational commitment but the impacts are stronger for transactional leadership style. Implications of the findings, potential limitations of the study, and directions for future research are suggested.

**Key words:** Organizational commitment, improved productivity, Malaysian executives, transformational leadership, transactional leadership.

## INTRODUCTION

It has become clear that organizational commitment (OC) has important implications for employees and organizations through various studies by researchers. Bennett and Durkin (2000) stated that the negative effects associated with a lack of employee commitment include absenteeism and turnover. As suggested by Drucker (1999), organizations are now evolving toward structures in which rank means responsibility but not authority, and where the supervisor's job is not to command, but to persuade. Hence, in order to be effective, it is critical for managers to influence their subordinates, peers, and superiors to assist and support their proposals, plans, and to motivate them to carry out with their decisions (Blickle, 2003).

It is important for the company to know what are the aspects that plays important role or have big impact in boosting the commitment of the employees. Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk and Scheck (2000) highlighted that leadership styles that encourage employee commitment

is essential in order for an organization to successfully implement business strategies, achieving their goals, gain competitive advantage and optimizing human capital. Previous researchers on managerial performance such as Kanter (1982) and Pavett and Lau (1983) pointed out that an important component of successful management is the ability to influence others. As such, committed employees are more motivated and dedicated towards meeting and achieving organizational goals (Pfeffer, 1998).

In Malaysia it is a common complaint that employees are no more loyal as they used to be in the past. Employees would tend to leave their companies for slightly better pay due to low commitment. According to Nijhof, de Jong and Beukhof (1998), the achievement of an organization does not only rely on how the organization utilizes its human capitals and competencies but also on how it incites commitment to the organization. Hence, the biggest challenge for Malaysian organizations is to pro-voke a sense of commitment in the employees and goes about instilling commitment and loyalty to their employees. Employees with sense of organizational commitment are less likely to engage in withdrawal behaviour

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and more willing to accept change (Iverson and Buttigieg, 1998).

The major concern of this research is to determine whether leadership theory and organizational commitment are applicable in the manufacturing companies located in Malaysia. This research attempts to answer the following questions:

In view of the above objectives, the questions that are to be addressed in this study are:

- (1) Does transformational leadership directly predict employees' organizational commitment?
- (2) Does transactional leadership directly predict employees' organizational commitment?

## **THEORETICAL**

### **BACKGROUND Leadership**

According to Yukl (2005), numerous studies on the theory of leadership can be summarized into five broad theories, namely, trait, behavioral, contingency or situational approach, contemporary integrative approach, and power and influence approach. The trait approach refers to the inherent personal characteristics of the leaders where the original trait conception of leadership was founded on the major assumption that leaders possessed universal characteristics that made them leaders; those traits were seen to be relatively fixed, inborn, and applicable in various situations. The behavioral approach is defined as behaviors of the leaders. Tjosvold (1981) theorized that if power were to be defined in field theory rather than in behavioral terms, it is more like the control of valued resources where A has power in relation to B when A has resources that can affect the extent that B accomplishes goals. Later, contingency or situational approach came into the picture which largely displaced the dominant trait and behavior approach. This approach views leadership effectiveness as dependent upon a match between leadership style and the situation. It also focuses on the degree to which the situation gives control and influence to the leaders. The primary thrust was that the qualities of leaders differentiate in various situations and so were those qualities were perhaps appropriate to a particular task and interpersonal context.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Past studies have constantly reported that transformational leadership is more effective, productive, innovative, and satisfying to followers as both parties work towards the good of organization propelled by shared visions and values as well as mutual trust and respect (Avolio and Bass, 1991; Fairholm, 1991; Lowe, Kroeck and Sivasu-

brahmaniam, 1996; Stevens, D'Intino and Victor, 1995). This implies that transformational leaders believed in sharing of formalized power and more often practice the use of personal power. In the same vein, other study has drawn a distinction between authentic transformational leadership and pseudo-transformational leadership (Bass, 1985). It was found that pseudo-transformational leaders would seek power and position even at the expense of their followers' achievements, thus their behaviors are inconsistent and unreliable (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999).

### **Transactional leadership**

Another type of leadership which has been widely used to in organizational behavior studies is transactional leadership. Burns (1978) who pioneered the study of transactional leadership indicated that transactional leaders are those who sought to motivate followers by appealing to their self-interests. These leaders motivate subordinates to achieve expected levels of performance by helping them to recognize task responsibilities, identify goals and develop confidence about meeting desired performance levels (Bass, 1990). According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transactional leaders employ three factors: (1) contingent reward (2) management-by-exception active and (3) management-by-exception passive. In contingent rewards, leader provides followers with material and psychological rewards contingent on the fulfillment of contractual obligations. Bass (1985) emphasized that by providing contingent rewards, a transactional leader might inspire a reasonable degree of involvement, loyalty, commitment and performance from subordinates. On the other hand, management-by-exception is whereby the leader is vigilant and ensures that followers meet predetermined standards. In management-by-exception passive, leader intervenes with followers only after non-compliance of standards has occurred or when mistakes have already happened.

### **Organizational commitment**

The main focus of this study is on organizational commitment as a multidimensional concept that represents the relationship between an employee and employer. According to Mathieu and Zajac (1990), if organizational commitment is intact then there will be relatively no turnover. Employees with sense of organizational commitment are less likely to engage in withdrawal behaviour and more willing to accept change (Iverson and Buttigieg, 1998). In a few studies related to organizational commitment, Meyer and associates (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001) came up with a three- component model of organizational commitment which incorporates affective, continuance and normative as the three dimensions of organizational

commitment. Allen and Meyer (1991) found that the three forms of commitment are related yet distinguishable from one another as well as from job satisfaction, job involvement, and occupational commitment.

On another occasion, affective commitment was found to have positive relationship with regard to turnover, absenteeism, job performance and organizational citizenship behaviour (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). These employees have less intention of leaving their respective organization and more willing to accept change (Iverson and Buttigieg, 1998).

### **Leadership and organizational commitment**

Lee (2004) found out that transformational leadership correlates significantly with organizational commitment with samples of research and development professional in Singapore. Contrary, transactional leadership does not have significant relationship with organizational commitment. On the other hand, Hayward, Goss and Tolmay (2004) noted that transformational leadership has moderate positive correlation with affective commitment. Lower correlation coefficients between transformational leadership and normative and continuance commitment were also found. The findings have further indicated that no correlation was found between transactional leadership and affective, normative and continuance commitment. Transformational leadership helps to increase trust, commitment and team efficacy (Arnold, Barling and Kelloway, 2001).

Other researchers such as Kent and Chelladurai (2001) posited that individualised consideration has positive relationship with both affective commitment and normative commitment. Similarly, positive correlations was found between intellectual stimulation and both affective commitment and normative commitment.

Bass and Avolio (1994) revealed that transformational leaders who encourage their followers to think critically and creatively can have an influence on their followers' commitment. This is further supported by Walumbwa and Lawler (2003) that transformational leaders can motivate and increase followers' motivation and organizational commitment by getting them to solve problems creatively and also understanding their needs. Price (1997) further suggests that employees are far more likely to be committed to the organization if they have confidence with their leaders. Hence, hypotheses are formulated as follow:

Hypothesis 1: There is significant relationship between transformational leadership and the affective, continuance and normative dimensions of organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between transactional leadership and the affective, continuance and normative dimensions of organizational commitment.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design, sample and procedure**

This study focuses on manufacturing employees in Malaysia as a population of interest. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed. Data was collected through survey questionnaires from subordinates comprising working executives who are currently reporting to lower and middle level managers. However, only 158 subordinates responded to the survey.

This study adopts the repertoire of Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) originating from Bass and Avolio (1997). The MLQ was formulated from the Full Range Leadership Development Theory (Bass and Avolio, 1997). Thus, the MLQ is based on the work of renowned leadership theorists like Bass, Avolio and Yammarino (Avolio and Bass, 1997). Thirty-two questions to measure the each of the component of transformational and transactional leadership which consists of idealized influence (attributed), idealised influence (behaviour), inspirational motivation, individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation, contingent rewards, management-by-exception active and management by exception active.

This study adopted Allen and Meyer (1996) method to measure the three dimensions of organizational commitment namely, affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment because of the conceptual consistency underlying the definitions that were used in its development and also it was proven to have adequate psychometric properties.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Profile of the respondents**

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents.

The 32 items of MLQ measuring components of transactional and transformational leadership were subject to a varimax rotated principal components analysis and were subsequently reduce to three and four interpretable factors respectively with eigenvalues greater than 1.00. In total, the three factors of transactional leadership styles and four factors of transformational leadership styles explained a total of 75.16 and 76.96% of the variance respectively.

On the other hand, OC is also subject to varimax principal components analysis with 3 interpretable factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 and explained 70.79% of the variance.

The reliability coefficients, means, and standard deviations, among the study variables are contained in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, the internal reliabilities of scales were between .67 and .93, which is clearly acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). Whereas standard deviations of the variables were either close to or exceeded 1.0, indicating that the study variables were discriminatory. Table 3 illustrates the intercorrelations among the subscales obtained using Pearson correlation to determine whether the subscales were independent measure of the same concept.

Generally, intercorrelations among the two dimensions of LMX registered value of between 0.39 - 0.79 ( $p < 0.01$ ),

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	92	58.97
	Female	64	41.03
Education background	High school	11	26.6
	Diploma	31	27.8
	College	96	38.6
	Postgraduate	13	3.8
	Others		1.9
Gross salary	Less than RM1,500	10	6.41
	Between RM1,501-RM3,000	61	39.1
	Between RM 3,001 and RM 4,500	42	26.92
	Between RM4,501 and RM 6,000	22	14.1
	Between RM 6001 and RM 7,500	15	9.62
	Above RM7,500	6	3.85
Sector attached	Consumer product	52	33.33
	Industrial product	41	26.28
	Construction product	24	15.39
	Trading product	39	25

**Table 2.** Descriptive of the main variables.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Reliability (alpha)
<b>Transactional Leadership</b>			
Management by Exception Active	4.13	1.18	.91
Contingent Rewards	4.78	1.06	.89
Management by Exception Passive	2.53	.98	.81
<b>Transformational Leadership</b>			
Intellectual Stimulation	4.21	1.17	.93
Idealized Influence	4.22	1.06	.91
Individualized Consideration	3.82	1.04	.86
Inspirational Motivation	4.94	1.01	.87
<b>Organizational Commitment</b>			
Affective Commitment	3.95	1.23	.93
Normative Commitment	4.35	1.00	.90
Continuance Commitment	3.56	1.01	.67

whereas, the intercorrelations for the subscales of transactional and transformational leadership ranged from 0.21 - 0.70 at the level of  $p < 0.01$ . As stated by some past researchers (e.g., Bass, 1985; Bass and Avolio, 1993), transformational leadership is a higher order construct comprising theoretically distinct but highly intercorrelated scales. On the other hand, the intercorrelations among the three components of commitment registered value of between 0.34 - 0.81 ( $p < 0.01$ ). On the whole, the results have demonstrated acceptable levels of correlation.

Multiple regression analysis was carried out to test the

hypotheses that comprised the direct and moderating effects of leadership styles, LMX, and organizational commitment. Tables 4, 5 and 6 present the results of the analyses.

As noted in Table 4 and 5, Step 1 was found to be significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). Hence the direct effects of the predictors significantly explained 66 and 65% of the variability in affective commitment and normative commitment. The analysis on affective commitment and normative commitment revealed that three dimensions of transformational leadership namely, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence and inspirational motivation were significantly

**Table 3.** Intercorrelations of the study variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Contingent Rewards	1.00									
2. Management by Exception Passive	-.46**	1.00								
3. Management by Exception Active	.38**	-.01	1.00							
4. Intellectual Stimulation	.62**	-.34**	.62**	1.00						
5. Idealized Influence	.54**	-.15	.55**	.70**	1.00					
6. Individualized Consideration	.55**	-.09	.36**	.67**	.60**	1.00				
7. Inspirational Motivation	.67**	-.40**	.21**	.38**	.50**	.55**	1.00			
8. Affective Commitment	.48**	-.20*	.54**	.74**	.75**	.55**	.30**	1.00		
9. Normative Commitment	.67**	-.37**	.46**	.68**	.68**	.60**	.60**	.81**	1.00	
10. Continuance Commitment	.21**	.11	.14	.05	.19*	.38**	.32**	.33**	.34**	1.00

Note. N = 156, \*\*p < 0.01, \*p < 0.05.

**Table 4.** Regression results between leadership styles and affective commitment.

Independent variable	Std beta step 1
<b>Model variables</b>	
Contingent Rewards (CR)	.16
Management by Exception Passive (MEP)	-.10
Management by Exception Active (MEA)	.07
Intellectual Stimulation (IS)	.21*
Idealized Influence (IF)	.25**
Individualized Consideration (IC)	.08
Inspirational Motivation (IM)	.19*
R <sup>2</sup>	.66
Adj R <sup>2</sup>	.64
R <sup>2</sup> Change	.65
F Value	39.73**

predicting affective commitment and normative commitment respectively.

In Table 6, Step 1 was found to be significant (p < 0.01). Only two dimensions in transformational leadership namely, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration were found to be significantly related to continuance commitment (p < 0.01).

## DISCUSSION

The statistical results have indicated a positive direct relationship between three dimensions of transformational leadership styles, namely intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and inspirational motivation, with affective and normative commitment. Similarly, two dimensions of transformational leadership, namely, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration were found to have positive relationship with continuance commitment. As stated by Meyer and Allen (1997), employees who stay with an organization because they feel obligated or

having no choice do not exhibit the same eagerness and involvement as employees who stay with an organization. As such, transformational leadership behaviors are not as strongly related to continuance commitment as to affective and normative commitment. This is also supported by a research done by Arnold, Barling and Kelloway (2001) and they further commented that transformational leadership helps to increase trust, commitment and team efficacy. This implies that the leaders who give advices, supports, and pay attention to the individual needs of followers will enhance the level of organizational commitment of the employees (Kent and Chelladurai, 2001).

Generally, the present study has exhibited that transformational leaders has a more significant and stronger relationship with organizational commitment. This is consistent with previous studies by Shamir, Zakay, Breinin and Popper (1998) and Walumbwa and Lawler (2003) who elucidated that leaders who exhibit transformational leadership styles are more effective in achieving significantly higher commitment levels than transactional

**Table 5.** Regression results between Leadership styles and Normative Commitment

Independent variable	Std beta step 1
<b>Model variables</b>	
Contingent Rewards (CR)	.16
Management by Exception Passive (MEP)	-.10
Management by Exception Active (MEA)	.07
Intellectual Stimulation (IS)	.21*
Idealized Influence (IF)	.25**
Individualized Consideration (IC)	.08
Inspirational Motivation (IM)	.19*
R <sup>2</sup>	.65
Adj R <sup>2</sup>	.64
R <sup>2</sup> Change	.65
F Value	39.73**

**Table 6.** Regression results between leadership styles and continuance commitment.

Independent variable	Std beta step 1
<b>Model variables</b>	
Contingent Rewards (CR)	.13
Management by Exception Passive (MEP)	.11
Management by Exception Active (MEA)	.19
Intellectual Stimulation (IS)	-.50**
Idealized Influence (IF)	.02
Individualized Consideration (IC)	.50**
Inspirational Motivation (IM)	.14
R <sup>2</sup>	.28
Adj R <sup>2</sup>	.24
R <sup>2</sup> Change	.28
F Value	8.14**

leaders.

On the other hand, Brower, Schoorman and Tan (2000) stated that effective managers do not work in isolation from their subordinates, instead they would prefer to work with their subordinates, and the nature of the relationship between the manager and subordinate has been acknowledged as complex, interactive, and exist reciprocity in the dyad.

## Conclusion

The objective of the research is to examine the relationship between leadership styles and employees' organizational commitment. Regression was used to investigate the relationship between these two variables. The findings have indicated that transformational leaders are more able to bring in commitment in employees than transactional leaders. This study represents the theoretic

and empirical research regarding leadership styles and organizational commitment in the manufacturing industry. There have been very few empirical researches on organizational commitment in the manufacturing industry. Inevitably, this study has contributed to the growing body of research on antecedents to leadership styles and organizational commitment by examining the two important leadership styles and its impact on organizational commitment. It is believed that this study would have added value to the literatures on supervisors' leadership styles, especially in the Malaysian settings since there were limited literatures done on similar setting. Besides, in view of the fact that the supervisors and subordinates were mainly from local manufacturing companies, the results of the study are very similar to the traditional cultural descriptor of collectivism (Abdullah, 1996; Hofstede, 1984). Thus, managers may anticipate lesser conflict between supervisors and subordinates in organizations when subordinates' values reflect their

culture. Clearly, this is an area that calls for further investigations.

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