

# The Influence of Transformational Leadership on Enhancing of Teacher's Professional Learning Community: A Conceptual Paper

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## Abstract

School leaders are the main influencing factor for Professional Learning Communities (PLC) practices among school teachers. The Professional Learning Community (PLC) in schools is one of the initiatives to improve the quality of teachers as facilitators and educators and can directly improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning (PdP) and students' achievement. Thus, this study examines the professional learning community (PLC) practices among teachers and how transformational leadership can be cultivated at the school level. School administrators should be more creative and intelligent in improving and maintaining PLC practices through transformational leadership practices. This study has several implications for the education system, specifically in providing inputs on how to increase the competence of leaders and teachers through PLC to stakeholders like the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE), the State Education Department (JPN), the District Education Office (PPD), and school administrators. Furthermore, it can help ensure that the culture of PLC in schools is properly implemented. In conclusion, transformational leadership can influence PLC practices among teachers in schools.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Professional Learning Community, Leadership, Educational Management, Education

## Introduction

The Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE), through the Teacher Education Division (BPG), has introduced the Professional Learning Community (PLC) as one of the initiatives to improve the quality of teachers as facilitators and educators. Its implementation aims to directly improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning (PdP) and student achievement. As mentioned by Azlin et al (2020), school leaders, through their leadership practices, are the main key to the success of PLC practices among school members. The education system is constantly changing in line with global demands today. This scenario has challenged teachers to improve their professional skills and drives them to become more creative and innovative in imparting knowledge and educating students. Therefore, implementing PLC in schools

could open up opportunities for teachers to improve the quality of their teaching and positively impact teaching and learning in school.

School leadership plays an important role in influencing teachers to engage in PLC voluntarily (Robert, 2019). School leaders should provide a space for teachers to discuss collectively in a team. Therefore, it can be said that strong and continuous support from school leaders is important to encourage PLC among school teachers. Studies by Azlin et al (2020); Robert (2019), in particular, have shown that PLC practices among school members can be strengthened through transformational leadership practices. Hence, this concept paper examines the professional learning community (PLC) among teachers and how transformational leadership can improve the PLC culture in school.

### **Professional Learning Community (PLC)**

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) was introduced by (Senge, 1990). It was initially born from the concept of a learning organisation. Hord (1997) also introduced a model in the field of education known as the Professional Learning Community (PLC), which is also based on the concept of continuous learning (Hord, 1997).

In general, the Professional Learning Community (PLC) facilitates a continuous learning process where teachers and school administrators work collaboratively and collectively to share knowledge to improve their teaching and learning practices. PLC also emphasises increasing teachers' professionalism for the benefit of students (Hord, 1997). The involvement of teachers in PLC activities is important for the continuous improvement of teachers' instructional practices and student learning. In this regard, PLC helps to improve its instructional practices, which directly helps to improve student achievement.

Nevertheless, many schools in Malaysia face difficulties in implementing PLC optimally (Chua et al., 2020). In this light, PLC is a new practice which is difficult to practice voluntarily as it requires collective and collaborative learning among community members at school. Furthermore, it is a novel concept which requires continuous negotiation and support from the school community and leaders Chediak et al (2018) found that PLC hindrances include the lack of communication among the school community and teachers being more comfortable working and planning learning plans alone. Similarly, Chua et al (2020) showed that teachers choose to work alone because they are not ready to conduct peer evaluation, and in some instances, some teachers cannot accept negative comments or feedback.

Next, the instruction to implement PLC in schools can take time away from teachers' existing tasks, so the time allocated to implement PLC in schools is often shortened. This is supported by Chua et al (2020), who found that most teachers face difficulties allocating time to sit together and discuss in groups and consider PLC an additional burdensome task. In other words, the implementation of PLC in schools among teachers is not done effectively, and in many schools, it is only conducted to meet the requirements dictated by MoE's top-level management. However, it is important to note that PLC helps improve student performance if done properly. In this light, PLC is the most suitable model despite its various implementation issues and challenges among school teachers. In this case, school leaders should play a role in improving the PLC culture in schools.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Various changes will happen under the Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013-2025. In the 3rd Wave of PPPM, teachers will be more actively involved in decision-making in tabulation, pedagogical approach, school-based assessment, and exemplary professional

excellence of colleagues (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018). In this regard, school leaders' awareness of the importance of facing changes, especially in the education sector, is essential. Transformational leadership has received the attention of many researchers, with many studies focusing on the effects of transformational leadership on employees. Transformational leadership is often positively linked with readiness for change (Peng et al., 2020). In this light, the transformational leadership approach has several strengths; it is suitable for positively influencing teachers' performance, effort, morale and satisfaction (Bass et al., 1985; Bass and Avolio, 1994). Furthermore, it emphasises the relationship between school leaders and teachers as subordinates. Studies have argued that fulfilling an individual's intrinsic needs in an organisation is more rewarding than practices that only involve extrinsic rewards. A study by Afif et al (2019) showed a strong correlation between a headmaster's transformational leadership and teachers' satisfaction. This reflects that transformational leadership is the best leadership style to improve PLC among school teachers. It has four dimensions that can positively influence teachers to effectively practice PLC to fulfil the nation's education agenda.

### **Transformational Leadership Theory**

Bass and Avolio's transformational leadership theory (1994) has four dimensions of transformational leadership outlined, which are ideal influence (II), motivational inspiration (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS) and individual consideration (IC).

First, the Ideal Influence dimension (II) refers to the behaviour of leaders who characterise themselves as *'role'* models to their subordinates. Bass and Avolio (1994) stated that leaders are admired, respected and trusted under this dimension and can influence their followers to emulate them. Among the behaviours of transformational leaders that allow them to receive this praise is that they act by considering the needs of others more than their wishes. This also means that transformational leaders avoid using their authority for personal gain.

Next, the Inspirational Motivational (IM) dimension refers to the leader's behaviour that can provide motivation and inspiration to the people around him by providing work or tasks that can give meaning and challenge his followers. The value of team spirit can also be stimulated from practices under this dimension. In addition, Bass and Avolio (1994) also argue that transformational leaders under this dimension act clearly on the mission and goals to be achieved and show a firm commitment to shared organisational goals.

The Intellectual Stimulation (IS) dimension describes the behaviour of leaders who stimulate their followers to be more creative and innovative by questioning various assumptions, reframing problems and approaching old situations in new ways. Under this dimension, followers are encouraged to try various new and different approaches, and they will not be criticised simply for using a different approach from their leader (Bass and Avolio, 1994; Northouse, 2013).

The last dimension, the dimension of Individual Consideration (IC), refers to the behaviour of leaders who pay special attention to the needs of success and growth of each of their followers as different individuals by acting as a coach or mentor Northouse (2013). Through this dimension, leaders also practice two-way communication methods by providing encouragement and support to their subordinates. Interactions between leaders and followers are also done differently according to individuals Bass and Avolio (1994). Bass and Avolio's (1994) Transformational Leadership Theory Framework is shown in Figure 1 below:

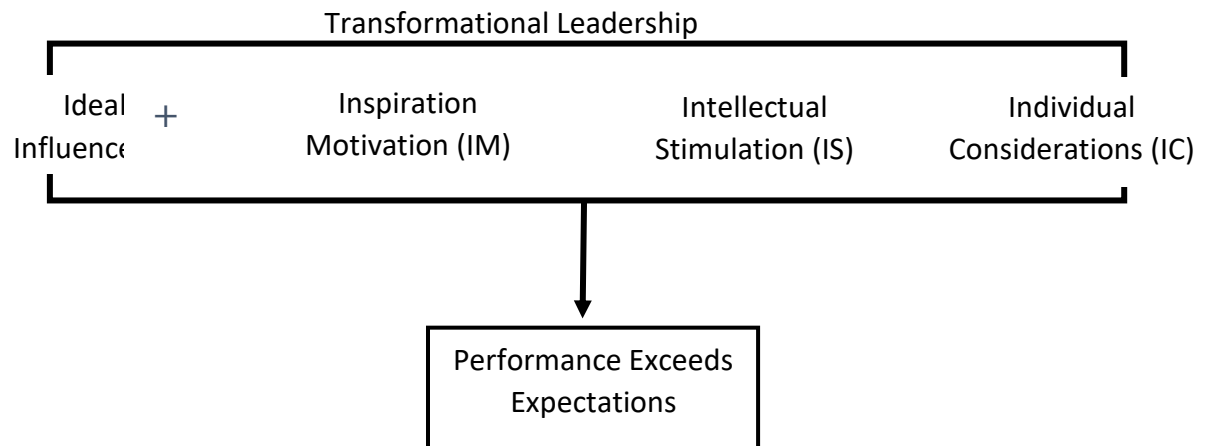


Figure 1: Transformational Leadership Theory Framework Bass and Avolio (1994)

Source: Adapted from Northouse (2013) and Bass and Avolio (1994)

### Professional Learning Community Model

Hord (2004)'s Five-Dimensional Model of the Professional Learning Community comprises supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice and a supportive environment.

The first dimension, the supportive and shared leadership dimension, refers to the need for the school leader's facilitative involvement to share his leadership, including their power and authority, by encouraging input and action from teachers and staff in decision-making. Through this dimension as well, the practice of fostering leadership among staff is encouraged. Next, the shared value and vision dimension looks at teachers' shared values, vision, and goals. Among other things that make up the attributes of this dimension are a focus on student learning, high expectations and a strong commitment to student learning (Hord, 1997). The third dimension is the dimension of collective learning and application. It refers to teachers' behaviour and engagement to learn from each other collectively and find new knowledge to apply to learning to fulfil students' needs. This dimension also includes sharing information by all parties (Hord, 2004). Next, sharing personal practices refers to teachers giving comments and feedback on their behaviour with their peers. Such review and feedback are one of the efforts to show individual support. In this dimension, the practice of guidance and 'mentoring' is practised. The last dimension, the supportive environment, concerns the organisation's physical environment and human relationships that support the learning atmosphere and collaborative learning practices.

The Five-Dimensional Model of the Professional Learning Community by Hord (2004) is illustrated in Figure 2 below

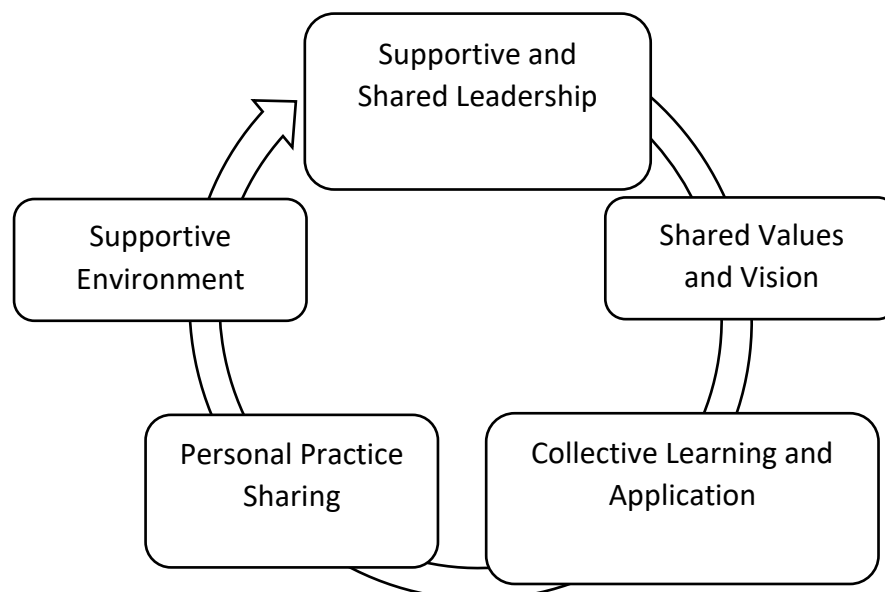


Figure 2: *The Five Dimensions of a Professional Learning Community identified by Hord, S. M. (2004). Learning together, leading together: Changing schools through professional learning communities.*

In conclusion, leaders who focus on motivating teachers by increasing their potential or capacity can create a sense of responsibility and encourage them to work collectively towards improving their instructional practices. Benoiel and Schechter (2017) also stated that school leaders could transform their school into an organisation that cultivates the practice of PLC when they allocate special time for teachers to meet and encourage positive collaboration practices in shared learning.

### Recommendations

Chua et al (2020) found the benefits of PLC among teachers. This parallels the findings of Fariza and Hazrati (2019) findings that PLC is very suitable and effective in supporting novice teachers in dealing with problems and difficulties in classroom learning through sharing sessions with more experienced and skilled teachers.

School leaders should create a learning culture by applying transformational leadership. This can be done by implementing professional learning communities in schools to encourage the sharing of knowledge and best practices among teachers. Implementing this professional learning community also can reduce the need for teachers to attend courses outside of the school. Furthermore, it allows positive interactions among teachers to achieve school excellence. Thus, to overcome the problem of time constraints, school leaders can suggest online implementation that can be implemented at any time according to teachers' convenience and time.

Moreover, MoE, through its Training Management System (SPLMOE), can change or improve the implementation strategy of PLC to prevent it from being a burden for teachers and implement a more flexible training schedule. This study also found that teachers prefer to practice PLC informally. MoE, through the National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL), can emphasise the aspect of transformational leadership in its training program.

At the same time, school leaders should be more creative and work smart in improving and maintaining the practice of PLC among teachers in schools. For instance, school leaders can encourage the practice of PLC among teachers by using positive reinforcement elements such as giving incentives to teachers either in the form of appreciation or recognition as a sign of support for the practice of PLC.

Future studies could involve school leaders with different leadership styles and teachers from different types of schools to compare their different perspectives and examine how different leadership styles can be applied to improve the culture of the professional learning community among teachers.

### **Conclusion**

A school leader's transformational leadership practices can influence teachers under his administration to further optimise the practice of PLC in schools. This concept paper has also presented implications for policy and training and school leadership and management practices. In addition, this concept paper provides insight into the significance of this study to the researcher. It can contribute empirical data on school leaders' transformational leadership and PLC practices among teachers. Such data can be used to help directly or indirectly in policy formulation or decision-making for all stakeholders, including the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE), to strengthen the practice of PLC among teachers. In conclusion, school leaders must always be aware and be more creative in their leadership practices to ensure the successful implementation of PLC among teachers

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