

# The Impact of Transformational Leadership and Teacher Commitment in Malaysian Public Schools

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## Abstract

The study investigated impact transformational leadership and their dimension on commitment from perspectives of teacher in the selected public primary schools. The targeted population consisted of all teachers in New Deal's school in Perak. The sample was made up of 317 teachers from primary schools to study the relationship between transformational leadership and commitment using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and the three – component model of employee commitment survey. Correlation coefficient was used to analyze data.

**Keywords:** Transformational, Leadership, Organizational commitment

## 1. Introduction

The Malaysian Ministry of Education identified numerous challenges in the public education system. These included (a) low participation and achievement among students disabilities and pupils from remote areas; (b) untrained teachers in subject such as mathematics and science, those teaching in rural schools; (c) ineffective schools leaders; (d) lack of empowerment in schools and teachers; (e) ineffective teaching approaches; (f) a disintegrated information system, which result in redundancy in task management; (g) academic achievements that fail to follow the international standard; (h) poor infrastructures and facilities in rural schools; (i) crowded classrooms; and (j) poor working condition that effect teachers' commitment (Education Ministry of Malaysia, 2006).

Abu-Tineh et al. (2008) asserted that the most critical for the success of schools reforms lies in the schools leadership. On a similar note, Fullan (1992) reiterated that, in schools reform efforts, the leaders become the key players for providing guidance and solutions to improve students' learning and developing teachers' professionalism. In relation to this, teachers' commitment is seen as an essential element for school reform ( Geijsel, Slegers, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2003).

Leadership is a critical antecedent for organizational commitment. Shamkir, Zakay, Brenien, and Popper (1998) proposed that transformational leadership works on the principle of

motivating subordinates toward task completion and accepting that leaders' vision and mission represent influencing factors in instilling commitment among the subordinates. Similarly, Bass and Avolio (1994) asserted that transformational leaders organizational commitment among their subordinates.

In the current context in which Malaysian public education system was undergoing a major transformation, this study offered an opportunity to examine the relationship between effective leadership Leithwood and Jantzi (1997) and teacher commitment. According to Segzin (2009), the improvement of schools and the success behind innovation in education lies primarily on teachers' activities, which are associated with the teaching and learning processes. Thus, Tsui and Cheng (as cited in Segzin, 2009) suggested that more studied should be carried out on teachers' conduct and its relationship to their performance in school environments.

## **2. Relevant Literature Review**

Transformational leadership has been recognized as one of the best leadership styles to be adopted for managing challenges in restructuring schools (Barnett, McComick, & Corners, 2001) stated that transformational leadership has been potential to elevate the level of commitment among teachers. In addition, effective leadership is significant for developing excellent organizations and individuals. To reaffirm this view, Kirpatrick and Lock (1996) expressed similar views because they promoted transformational leadership as having a constructive outcome on the followers. Similiarly, Walumba, Lawler, Avolio, Wang and Shi (2005) asserted that, based on 20 years of leadership studies, transformational leaders manage to increase the levels of commitment and satisfaction of their subordinates, in addition to bringing about their concerted efforts.

### **2.1 Transformational Leadership Style**

Transformational leadership has become the most frequently researched and supported theory over past two decades (Avolio, Walumba, and Weber, 2009; Judge and Bono, 2000) because of its demonstrated influence on increasing followers' positive attitude, behaviors, and level performance.

In current views, Bass and Avolio (1994) pointed out that transformational leaders encourage followers to perform beyond what the possibly think. The leaders set higher expectations and encourage followers to work harder and order to attain it. In doing this, the leaders employ one or more of the following approaches:

1. Idealized influence. Leaders give attention to followers' needs and try to fuffill them. The leaders become role models who are admired, respected, and trusted. In return, followers recognize leaders and want to be like them.

2. Inspirational motivational. Leaders motivate and inspire followers by providing challengers in their work. The leaders provide vision and clearly communicate the importance of achieving such vision for the benefit of the organization.
3. Intellectual stimulation. Leaders encourage followers to be more innovative and creative in their work. The followers are encouraged to find a new solution when facing problems at work and view a problem as an opportunity.
4. Individualized consideration. Leaders pay attention to followers' individual potential and develop it to higher level. The leader acts as a mentor or coach.

Drawing from research that involved 400 leaders from all sectors of local communicates, including education, health care, arts, industry, and government, Bass and Avolio (1994) noted that transformational leadership is noticed when leaders (a) encourage followers and colleagues to see their work from their views, (b) inspire the followers to view the importance of the mission and vision of their organization, (c) nurture followers' potential to higher levels, and (d) arouse followers to see beyond their interest for the benefit of organization. Transformational leadership also moves followers to be a role model by displaying commitment, passion, and dedication toward the designed goals. With such characteristics, the leaders instill trust, pride, and confidence among followers. As a result, followers are able to perform beyond their initial anticipations. With leaders placing trust in particular, it may in some way influence some positive organizational outcomes (e.g., organizational commitment among followers).

## **2.2 Transformational Leadership and Organizational Commitment**

Bass and Avolio (1994) asserted that transformational leaders encourage followers to think creatively, let followers make decisions, inspire trustworthiness, and respect the diversity of the followers' potential are likely to influence the followers to supply organizational commitment. This notion was supported by Walumba and Lawler (2003), who pointed out those transformational leaders who motivate follower's involvement in their work and, as a consequence, will elevate followers' organizational commitment to a higher level. In relation of this, Lee (2004) identified earlier research that found a higher degree of organizational commitment among followers' whose leaders promoted involvement in the decision-making process, placed emphasis consideration, and were helpful and concerned with their followers' growth.

Relatively speaking, Bass and Avolio (1994) asserted that intellectual stimulation behavior relies on encouraging and challenging followers to be creative and innovative in performing tasks and solving problems. With this in mind, it has e followers to be more responsible and emulate their leaders' (Bass, 1985). Individualized consideration behavior that depends on feedback and encourage provided by leaders will also enhance the followers' beliefs in their on capabalities (Huges, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1999). Wayne, Liden Sparrowe (2000) that leaders

who provide followers with more act participation in decision making, challenges, trust, responsibilities, and self- determination will generate a greater commitment among followers toward improving and developing an organization.

### **2.3 Transformational leadership Schools Context**

Parrish (as cited in Abu-Tineh et al., 2008) asserted that research on educational reform recognizes the greater role leadership in contributing to the excellent of schools. Fullan (1992) suggested that leadership is this most important element in successful schools reform because it offers an excellent solution for students' learning improvement and teachers' professional growth. Heck and Hallinger (1999) pointed out that, based on their examination of 10 years of educational research conducted by notable scholars in the field, there has been an obvious movement in the depth of understanding about schools leadership and is outcome. In the era of schools restructuring and school accountability, leadership has been identified as the main for such reform. Furthermore, with the growing demand from the community, it is vital for school leaders to prepare themselves with knowledge and skills in order to be effectiveness (Stewart, 2006). According to Hallinger (2003), the emergence of transformational leadership the school reform process is appropriate because the leadership style focuses on teachers' empowerment, participative leadership, and organizational improvement through learning. Hallinger inicated that the transformational leadership approaches is crucial in ascertaining the success of the learning process in schools.

Leithwood et al. (1999) indicated that transformational leadership is highly appropriate for school reforms because it has provided opportunity teachers to develop and grow professionally in response to the increasing demand coming from school environment. Transformational leadership is viewed to be receptive for school reforms because it promotes the organization and its members, provides a vision, encourage participative leadership, and a positive schools well.

### **2.4 Organizational Commitment**

Organizational commitment has become a highly researched subject over the past 40 years (Joolideh & Yeshodhara, 2008). Organizational commitment has several theoretical explanations, but no consensus exists on how best to define it. In the early conceptualizations, Becker (as cited in Joolideh & Yeshodhara, 2008) viewed organizational commitment as a one-dimensional construct because commitment is referred to as an activity that is associated with cost when someone quits from an organization. Elizur and Koslowsky (2001), on the other hand, viewed commitment as something that relates to a personal value to a mark the individual's existence in the organization. In the same direction, Mowdays, Steers and Porter (1979) viewed commitment from perspective of emotional attachment between employees and an organization. However, Mowday reassessed al. (1982) their view when the later stated

that commitment should include (a) recognition of the organization's beliefs, (b) willingness to work hard for the organizational interests, and (c) willingness to remain in the organization.

Meyer and Allen (1991) argued that , even though organizational commitment has been defined in many ways in an abundance of literature, the term echoes into three common themes: effective attachment to the organization, costs associated with leaving the organization, and obligation to stay with organization. Based on the argument and extensive search in literature reviews, Meyer and Allen then argued that commitment is a “psychological state that (a) characterizes the employee's relationship with the organization and (b) has implications for the decision to continue or discontinue membership in the organization” (p.67). Realizing that the psychological state is vast, Meyer and Allen further defined commitment in terms of affective, continuance, and normative as follows:

1. Affective commitment refers to relationship built between an individual and the organization based on emotional attachment and how the employee absorbs and assimilates with an organization. The employee stays in an organization because he or she wants to do so.
2. Continuance commitment refers to the relationship built between an individual and the organization based on cost consideration because the employee views the potential losses when he or she leaves the organization. Therefore, the employee stays in an organization because he or she needs to do so.
3. Normative commitment refers to the relationship built between an individual and the organization based on responsibility. The employees stay in an organization because they that ought to stay.

Meyer and Allen (1997) asserted that effective commitment among employees contributes toward better job satisfaction, improvement in job performance, instilling of better behaviors, reduction in turnover rates, and development of leadership skills. Normative commitment rises from the sense of obligation of employees toward the organization in which they work as positive relationship to performance but not as strong as effective commitment (Karrasch, 2003). The continuation of commitment that rises from cost association, in turn, manages only to keep employees performing their jobs as required; therefore, no relationship exists between these types of commitment job performance (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

### **3. Methodology**

The population of this study included teachers from 40 primary New Deal schools in a Malaysian suburb. Based on a formula suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (as cited in Gay & Airasian, 2003) for the population size 400, the appropriate sample size would be 196. However, for the purpose validity and involvement of as many respondents as possible, the sample size for this study involved 317 teachers.

The research adopted for the study was descriptive study survey. For the purpose of collecting data, two sets of instruments were used. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire: 5X-Short (MLQ-5X-S) was used to answer Research Questionnaire 1, and three-component model of employee commitment survey (TCMECS). The MLQ-5X-S is the most recent version of the multifactor leadership questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 2004) and can be used to measure teachers' perception of headmasters' leadership styles and behaviors. The instrument was developed by Bass and Avolio in 1995 (as cited in Bass & Avolio, 2004) and published by Mind Garden.

For the purpose of this study, the rater form was utilized. The dimensions were (a) idealized influences, (b) idealized influences, (c) inspirational motivation, (d) intellectual stimulation, (e) individualized consideration.

The TCMECS was developed based on three-component model of commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997). The instrument is used to measure three types of employee commitment to an organization. The TCMECS has three component to measure: (a) desire based (i.e., affective commitment), (b) obligation based (i.e., continuance commitment), and (c) cost based (i.e., normative commitment). Responses were recorder on 5-point likert scale, 0 "not at all", 1 "once in a while", 2 "sometimes", 3 "fairly often" and 4 "frequently, if not always".

#### **4. Data Analysis And Result Interpretation**

Table 1

*Descriptive statistics for dependent variable and its dimension*

Variables (Transformational leadership)	Mean	Standard deviation
Idealized influence	4.09	0.570
Inspirational motivation	4.10	0.520
Individualized Consideration	4.04	0.604
Intellectual stimulation	3.95	0.598

It can be deduced from table 1 above it shows the mean score was used to analyze the transformational leadership dimension. From the value, inspirational motivation had the highest score (M=4.10, SD, =0.520), Idealized influence had the second highest (M=4.09,SD=0.570), and individualized consideration was third (M=4.04, SD=0.604). It shows that , in general, the level of leadership was high, where Inspirational motivation had the highest level, followed by idealized influence, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation.

Table 2

*Descriptive statistics for independent variable and its dimension*

Variables(Organizational commitment)	Mean	Standard deviation
Affective commitment	4.05	0.866
Continuance commitment	4.13	0.850
Normative commitment	4.07	0.767

It can be deduced from table 2 above it shows the mean score was used to analyze the transformational leadership dimension. From the value, continuance commitment had the highest score ( $M=4.13$ ,  $SD=0.850$ ), had the second normative commitment ( $M=4.07$ ,  $SD=0.767$ ) and continuance commitment was third ( $M=4.05$ ,  $SD=0.866$ ). It shows that, in general, the level of commitment of teachers was high, where continuance commitment had the highest level, followed by normative commitment and affective commitment.

Table 3

*Correlation of Transformational and its dimension with in independent variable*

Variables	Organizational commitment	r
Transformational leadership	Pearson correlation by (2-tailed)	0.623
Idealized influence	Pearson correlation by (2-tailed)	0.847
Inspirational motivation	Pearson correlation by (2-tailed)	0.848
Individualized Consideration	Pearson correlation by (2-tailed)	0.901
Intellectual stimulation	Pearson correlation by (2-tailed)	0.763

Table 3 shows that transformational leadership has positive and significant relationship with organizational commitment ( $r=0.623$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This implies that transformational leadership predicts organizational commitment among Malaysia schools. Individualized Consideration has positive, high significant with relationship organizational ( $r=0.901$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Inspiration motivation had the second positive and significant relationship with organization commitment ( $r=0.847$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Idealized influence has also positive and significant relationship with organization commitment ( $r=0.847$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Intellectual stimulation has positive and significant relationship with organizational leadership ( $r=0.763$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that transformational leadership and its dimension have positive and significant relationship with organization commitment. This means that transformational leadership and its dimensions predict organizational commitment.



## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the conclusions above, the high level of transformational leadership practiced by the headmasters had influenced teachers' commitment significantly. Jorah (2009) conducted a study of the influence of transformational leadership styles of principals toward teachers' commitment. The study found that transformational leadership has a significant influence on teachers' commitment. Rusmini (2006) conducted a study examining the relationship between leadership, teachers' commitment, teachers' competency, and school effectiveness. The study found relationship between teachers' commitment, teachers' competency, and school effectiveness. Teachers' commitment appears to be the most important among the predictors in determining a school's effectiveness.

The second conclusion of the study stated that transformational leadership influenced teachers' commitment significantly. All four transformational leadership factors (eg. Intellectual stimulation, idealized influenced -behavior, inspiration motivation and individual consideration) had significant relationship with teachers, commitment. In relation, the third conclusion stated that, to a certain extent, the transformational leadership factor of contingent reward also contributed to the teachers' commitment. Shamir et al. (1998) proposed that transformational leadership works on the principle of motivating subordinates for task completion and accepting that leaders' vision and mission represent influencing factors in instilling commitment among subordinates. Similarly, Bass and Avolio (1994) asserted that transformational leaders instill organizational commitment among their subordinates.

The present study is considered as a preliminary study in the field, particularly for local contexts in which there is limited study available. Therefore, more similar research with more public primary schools involved is needed in order to confirm the outcomes for the sake of school reforms. In similar context in which school reforms also take place.

The present study examined the transformational leadership on teacher commitment. For further research, Nguni et al. (2006) recommended the examination of potential mediating variables is the effect. Some potential mediating variables include job satisfaction, organizational climate; trust in the leader, and satisfaction with the leader. These mediator variable could explain the extent to which these variables mediate the effect on teachers; commitment.

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