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## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT IN POLYTECHNIC KUCHING SARAWAK

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### ABSTRACT

It is believed that without high-performing leaders in an educational organization as well as committed academic staff, student academic achievement would be affected, the management will collapse and the overall quality of education will deteriorate. Hence, this research explores the relationship between transformational leadership styles of Heads of Departments and organizational commitment of academic staff in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak. A total of 165 academic staff from eight major departments were involved in this quantitative research. The findings showed that the Heads of Departments practiced a high level of transformational leadership styles. Besides that, the level of organizational commitment among the academic staff was proven to be high. The findings also revealed that a significant relationship existed between transformational leadership style of Heads of Departments and organizational commitment of academic staff in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak. This research contributes to the development of an organization by encouraging other polytechnics to practice transformational leadership style to ensure academic staff commitment leading to a more effective and sustainable organization.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Organizational Commitment, Heads of Departments, Academic Staff, Polytechnic



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## INTRODUCTION

Key characteristics of successful educational systems are the quality, capability and competency of academic members and they include lecturers, teachers, tutors and facilitators (Nazari, 2012). The staff play the most significant role in accomplishing the educational goals, thus making it important to make them stay committed. At the same time, leadership is a bond which makes people work together (Bushra, Ahmad, & Naveed, 2011). Modern leaders were said to adopt an attitude that supports employees, prepare vision, cultivate hope, encourage creative thinking, individualized consideration and broaden the communication (Bushra et al., 2011). All of the features mentioned about modern leaders are directed toward the transformational leadership style. Transformational leaders are portrayed as leaders who motivate their followers to achieve something more than they expected, being able to inspire them, trigger their capabilities for innovation and looking at problems from different angles (Gathungu, Iravo, & Namusonge, 2015). It is recommended that transformational leadership dimensions be applied to the principal in every school to ensure the best school performance (Man, Don, & Ismail, 2016).

Besides that, leadership is also linked to the followers' level of organizational commitment. A study illustrated that teacher's level of commitment in low achieving school show a high commitment whenever they got encouragement from the principal (Saad & Sankaran, 2016). In fact, studies have found that pleased employees who felt that they were treated with respect and appreciated by the management feel more attached to the organization (Stup, 2006). Therefore, leadership is one of the factors of employee commitment.

In the meantime, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) or the MEB (HE) was developed by the Ministry of Education to equip Malaysia toward becoming a high-income nation, thus putting the education system to a higher, more efficient and effective level. One of the key initiatives mentioned in the Blueprint was to move decision rights from the Ministry to the leadership of higher learning institutions. This has brought increased responsibilities to leadership of higher learning institutions. Through the new educational policy implementation, the importance of a leader to transform the institution into a high performing one is undeniable (Ghavifekr, Hoon, Ling, & Ching, 2014). At the same time, highly committed academic staff are also an important element that should be taken into consideration in order to enhance educational efficiency and effectiveness in institutions such as polytechnics.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

The effectiveness of leadership in educational institutions has become a major issue in the Malaysian education system (Azizi, Nor, & Jazmi, 2014). Rapid changes in the education system including factors such as technology advancement as well as meeting society needs and demands contribute to the level of effectiveness among leaders. Even more challenging is the process of education reform involving curriculum revision and other ongoing education transformational programs. Hence, leadership in polytechnics has become increasingly complex and challenging. Due to these changes, problems might occur when Heads of Departments fail to engage themselves quickly with innovations to incorporate toward achieving organizational goals and expectations. Ramiah (2007) mentioned in his study that teachers were affected by the power and leadership style especially of administrators and principals. When leaders such as Heads of Departments fail to engage, low level of commitment among workers including the academic staff contributes to turnover (Liou, 2008).

In fact, in recent years, leadership style and organizational commitment have been related to the high turnover among workers (Yang, 2012). In Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak, requesting for transfer to other institution and seeking other opportunity outside the polytechnic are some of the consequences occurred if the leaders failed to meet the staff needs and thus lead to low level of commitment among them. Besides that, Seyal and Afzal (2013) mentioned in their study that little research has been done to examine the application and practicality of transformational leadership styles especially of academics in higher learning institutions including polytechnics.



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They added that educational institutions including polytechnics behave entirely differently compared to profit based organizations. Hence research on academic staff commitment is needed by the universities so that more knowledge on acquisition and retention of affectively committed staff can be added (Wainaina, Iravo, & Waititu, 2014).

Organizational commitment is said to be linked to many factors. Many studies have shown that teachers nowadays have been dealing with various issues regarding their career such as work overload, inability to cope with changes following education policies and technology advancement, emotional instability and so forth. To make matters worse, leadership styles were said to be one of the factors influencing organizational commitment (Almutairi, 2013). In the Malaysian context, numerous studies have been conducted on organizational commitment among teachers in schools and vocational colleges. However, not many researchers have conducted research on organizational commitment among academic staff in polytechnics (Ismail, 2014). In short, there is little knowledge about transformational leadership style and organizational commitment of academic staff in polytechnics. Hence, this study will investigate the level of transformational leadership style among the Heads of Departments and level of organizational commitment among the academic staff in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak. At the same time, this study will identify the relationship between transformational leadership style of Heads of Departments and organizational commitment of academic staff in that polytechnic.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework in this study was developed based on the theory of transformational leadership by Bass and Avolio (1994) while the theory of organizational commitment was developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). Bass and Avolio (1994) had listed four components of transformational leadership namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), idealized influence leaders are perceived as role models by their followers basically because they are well respected and trusted. Inspirational motivation leaders are portrayed as those who have the ability to motivate their followers. Individualized consideration leaders on the other hand are regarded as mentors to the followers because each follower has his or her own needs and demands; thus requires a leader to treat it differently. Lastly, for intellectual stimulation, a leader should be able to develop the followers' innovative features.

As for organizational commitment, Allen and Meyer (1990) had mentioned three major components and they were affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. Affective commitment is related to the emotional aspect while continuance commitment is the followers' concern over leaving the organization. Normative commitment on the other hand is about the followers' sense of responsibility toward the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Transformational leadership has always been associated with employee organizational commitment. It was said to be closely related to influencing employee organizational commitment. In fact, many previous researches had been conducted to identify the relationship between both variables; transformational leadership and organizational commitment (Saeed, Gelaidan, & Ahmad, 2013; Yusuf, Aziz, Amin, Muda, & Ibrahim, 2012). The result had shown that the relationship between both variables was significant and positive. For example, in the study conducted by Saeed, Gelaidan, and Ahmad (2013), it was revealed that transformational leadership and the three dimensions of organisational commitment have shown a significant relationship in higher learning institution. Besides that, the highly committed teachers were very much influenced by highly practised transformational leadership (Raman, Cheah, Don, & Khalid, 2015). Thus, it has been proven that both theories are strongly related to each other especially in determining their relationship.

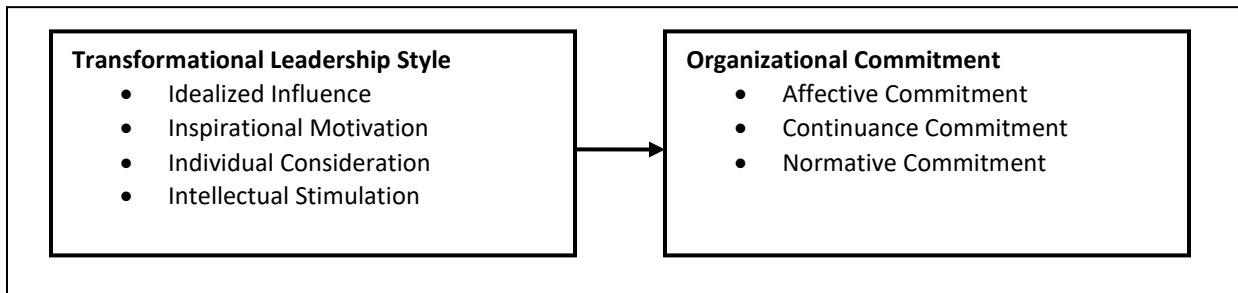


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework (Source: Allen & Meyer, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1994;)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Transformational Leadership Style*

According to Gathungu et al. (2015), transformational leadership is divided into four main components; idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. A leader is said to be idealized influence if he or she is able to become a role model for the followers due to his or her ethical behavior, respect, pride and trust. At the same time, such leader is willing to sacrifice whatever necessary for the benefits of the group. Hence idealized influence leaders gain great respect from their followers (Northouse, 2001). In the meantime, inspirational motivation shows to what extent the leader inspires the followers in articulating a vision. Such leader will challenge their followers to work enthusiastically and optimistically in making sure that they instill the spirit of teamwork and commitment. Thus, it provides meaning to the work (Gathungu et al., 2015). In the meantime, with intellectual stimulation, a leader is not only able to arouse their followers to become more creative but also be more innovative. Those leaders encourage the followers to tackle the problems in new ways and at the same time, hoping to provide new solutions by performing beyond their current abilities. For individualized consideration, leader plays a role of mentor to the followers. The followers are treated according to their different talents and knowledge (Gathungu et al., 2015). Emotional aspect is the key element to being a good coach or role model to the followers.

Organizations employing transformational leadership have higher chances of being more effective and increase the level of motivation among employees so that they are more innovative, satisfied and willing to work in teams (Fitzgerald & Schutte, 2010). Transformational leaders were also said to be able to increase the level of organizational commitment among employees in the field of education especially in terms of their continuance commitment (Saeed et al., 2013).

### *Organizational Commitment*

Organizational commitment can be defined as the extent to which employees get involved and identified with an organization (Saeed et al., 2013). The same study has categorized organizational commitment into affective, continuance and normative. Emotion of a worker is closely linked to the affective commitment. It basically concerns with developing emotional connection with the organization, identification with an organization and desire to maintain and become loyal to an organization. Continuance commitment refers to worker's own awareness on the cost of leaving or staying with the organization (Saeed et al., 2013). If they think that the cost of staying with the organization is greater than the cost of leaving, then they will choose to stay with the organization. Unlike affective commitment, continuance commitment refers to psychological attachment which includes the effort; time and development spent throughout years of staying with the same organization.



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Normative commitment reflects worker's sense of responsibility toward the organization. It is related to the worker's high level of obligation to continue the employment (Saeed et al., 2013). In line with that, one of the factors that contributed to high level of organizational commitment is transformational leadership style because it has been perceived as being able to influence organizational commitment (Farahani, Taghadosi, & Behboudi, 2011; Javaid & Mirza, 2013). In Malaysia, a study conducted by Ismail (2014) and had found that academic staff in Polytechnic Sultan Abdul Halim Muadzam Shah had shown a high level of organizational commitment among them. Highly committed academicians were also said to be influenced by highly practiced transformational leadership style.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

To discern the relationship between transformational leadership style of Heads of Departments and level of commitment of academic staff in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak, descriptive correlation research design was employed. Correlation is used to explain the relationship between two variables tested which are transformational leadership style and level of commitment. Descriptive analysis is then used to describe the characteristics of the data collected. The method used to collect the data is the questionnaire. To analyze the data collected, quantitative research design is employed. A pilot study was carried out prior to the actual study to further enhance the effectiveness of the questionnaires used towards achieving the objectives of the study. In terms of population, it involved lecturers teaching in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak only.

### *Population and Sampling*

The target population for this study was the academic staff of Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak. A total sample of 165 respondents from eight major academic departments was selected based on the sampling table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The method used is stratified random sampling technique. To represent the sample size according to the proportion, the total number of staff from each department is divided by the total number of the population which is 293. The figure obtained is converted into percentage. In short, the number of staff representing their respective department is determined by the percentage obtained earlier. Later, the respondents were selected based on systematic random sampling technique. From the name list obtained, every second name was chosen to fulfill the number of sample obtained earlier. The following Table 1 shows further division of the academic staff.

Table 1

*Sample of the Respondents*

Department	No. of staff	Percentage of sample (%)	No. of sample
1. Civil Engineering	42	14	23
2. Mechanical Engineering	59	20	33
3. Commerce	40	14	23
4. Electrical Engineering	35	12	19
5. Information Technology and Communication	32	11	18
6. Petrochemical Engineering	23	8	13
7. Mathematics, Science and Computer	31	11	18
8. General Studies	31	11	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>293</b>		<b>165</b>



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## **Research Instruments**

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was employed to measure the transformational leadership style among Heads of Departments. The MLQ employed was adapted from the questionnaire used in the study by Ismail, Mohamed, Sulaiman, Mohamad, and Yusuf (2011). In the meantime, the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire as used in the study by Ismail et al. (2011) was adapted to measure the level of organizational commitment among academic staff in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak. Hence, to collect the data needed, a survey questionnaire was used in this study. There were three main parts; Part A, B and C. Part A was the respondents' profile which consists of only their gender while Part B consists of 20 items related to transformational leadership style. As for Part C, it consists of 18 items related to organizational commitment. The total number of items in the questionnaire was 38 items. Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, namely: (1) 'strongly disagree', (2) 'disagree', (3) 'uncertain', (4) 'agree' and (5) 'strongly agree'.

In order to ensure that the questionnaire is suitable for use in the polytechnic context, it has been through a pilot study. In the pilot study, 30 questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 30 academic staff from eight major academic departments in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak. To ensure the pilot study respondents were in line with the population of the study, the same criteria in the actual study was used. The sample included 15 male and 15 female academic staff from eight different departments. To prevent these respondents from being selected again for the actual study, they were chosen based on the name list obtained from each department. Only the first and second names were chosen provided that they were one female and one male. If otherwise, then the next name in the list was selected. At the same time, the questionnaire has also been submitted to the content and language experts for further review and validation. The result of the reliability test based on Cronbach's alpha is shown in Table 2:

Table 2  
*Cronbach's Alpha*

Variable	Cronbach alpha
Transformational Leadership Styles	.970
Organizational Commitment	.920

## **Data Collection**

Data were collected using questionnaires. Since all of the respondents were from Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak, so it was easier for us to distribute and collect the returned questionnaires and also to ensure that there is no misinterpretation about the items asked. At the same time, to ensure that the questionnaires were safely returned and tracked, they were numbered from 1 to 180. Instead of 165 questionnaires, ten extra questionnaires were distributed in order to prevent any insufficient number of questionnaires. In total, 180 questionnaires were distributed and collected but only 165 questionnaires were used for data analysis in this study.

## **Data Analysis**

The 'Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences' (SPSS) was employed to analyze the data collected. The data were checked for entry accuracy in order to ensure freedom from data entry errors. To summarize the data about the level of both variables, we used descriptive statistics. Mean and standard deviation were calculated to sum up the whole findings of the data. To find out the relationship, a Pearson correlation test was employed and in the meantime, to test the significance, two-tailed test was conducted.



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## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### *Respondent's Profile*

From 165 respondents involved, 58% or 95 respondents were male staff. In the meantime, 42% or 70 respondents were female staff. Table 3 shows the number of respondents based on their gender and Table 4 shows further division of the respondents according to their academic departments.

Table 3  
*Gender of the Respondents*

Gender	No. of respondents	Percentage
1. Male	95	58%
2. Female	70	42%
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4  
*Respondent's Profile*

No.	Departments	No. of respondents
1.	Commerce	23
2.	General Studies	18
3.	Mechanical Engineering	33
4.	Electrical Engineering	19
5.	Petrochemical Engineering	13
6.	Civil Engineering	23
7.	Information Technology and Communication	18
8.	Mathematics, Science and Computer	18
	<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>

### *Level of Transformational Leadership Style*

Table 5 shows the mean and standard deviation obtained for four components of transformational leadership style tested. The highest mean score obtained were 4.16 while 4.00 were the lowest mean score. From the four components, inspirational motivation displayed the highest mean score ( $M = 4.16$ ) and the lowest mean score was individual consideration ( $M = 4.00$ ). This signifies that the Heads of Departments in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak encourage and inspire their staff by giving them a sense of appreciation towards their work and set difficulties to it. Despite the differences in the score of mean, each individual item still shows a high level of practice ( $M > 3.68$ ). As can be seen from Table 5, total mean score for transformational leadership style practiced by the Heads of Department was 4.09. It can be concluded that majority Heads of Departments signified a high level of transformational leadership styles towards their academic staff in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak.



Table 5  
*Level of Transformational Leadership Style*

<b>Transformational Leadership Components</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Level</b>
Inspirational Motivation	4.16	.604	High
Intellectual Stimulation	4.08	.571	High
Individual Consideration	4.00	.696	High
Idealized Influence	4.09	.589	High
<b>Transformational Leadership</b>	<b>4.09</b>	<b>.591</b>	<b>High</b>

***Level of Organizational Commitment***

Table 6 portrays the mean and standard deviation obtained for three components of organisational commitment tested. The highest mean score were 3.89 while the lowest mean score was 3.87. From the three components, affective commitment displayed the highest mean score ( $M = 3.89$ ) and the lowest mean score was for normative commitment ( $M = 3.87$ ). Overall, the academic staffs from eight main academic departments in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak employed a high level of organisational commitment among them.

Table 6  
*Organizational Commitment*

<b>Organizational Commitment Components</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Affective Commitment	3.89	.667
Normative Commitment	3.87	.628
Continuance Commitment	3.88	.590
<b>Organizational Commitment</b>	<b>3.88</b>	<b>.584</b>

***Relationship between Transformational Leadership Style & Organizational Commitment***

As for the relationship between both variables, a 2-tailed Pearson correlation coefficient test was employed. From the result obtained, it can be concluded that the relationship between transformational leadership style of Heads of Departments and organisational commitment of academic staff in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak is significant ( $r = .580$ ). This finding has shown a similarity with a study carried out by Shurgabi (2014) whereby there is a strong and positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. Another study conducted by Fasola, Adeyemi and Olowe (2013) also revealed the same result. In short, transformational leadership style is one of the determining factors that could influence staff commitment level. In fact, leaders who practiced transformational leadership are considered as better able to enhance employee commitment (Jain & Duggal, 2015). Table 7 shows the correlation between transformational leadership and organisational commitment.

Table 7  
*Correlation Between Transformational Leadership and Organizational Commitment*

<b>Transformational</b>		<b>Organizational</b>
	Pearson Correlation	.580**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	165

Note: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).





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## DISCUSSION

Based on what has been concluded earlier, the Heads of Departments from eight main academic departments in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak were practising a high level of transformational leadership style when performing their duties. This indicates that the Heads of Departments in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak generally stimulate their followers to be more creative, inspire them by providing vision and meaning to their work, treat each employee uniquely and help them to develop their strengths. The study has also proven that transformational leadership nature of encouraging subordinates resulting in their enhanced confidence is one of the main reasons such leadership style is favored by the academic staff in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak. Hence, it can be concluded that the Heads of Departments can ensure their academic staff are highly determined, motivated and can perform at their best individually or in group via their transformational leadership style.

Generally, the findings of the study show some similarities with that of other studies. It is consistent with previous studies (Ali & Farid, 2016; Ibrahim, Ghavifekr, Ling, Siraj, & Azeez, 2014; Shurbagi, 2014). Saeed et al. (2013) in their study mentioned that leadership is an essential factor that could enhance organizational commitment in higher education especially among the academic staff. Being Head of Department in an academic department means being able to show the characteristics of charisma, stimulate intellectual discourse, inspire and motivate as well as consider each individual. These elements should be well balanced as they play a huge role in ensuring that each academic staff member stays committed; affectively, continuously and normatively. Based on the result obtained which have seen both variables were highly practiced by both Heads of Departments and academics staff in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak, it could possibly lead to a more effective organization especially in producing more high skilled workers.

Besides that, transformational leadership qualities have been proven to be important aspects within the social context especially in making teachers more committed in schools (Ibrahim et al., 2014). Thus, this study has signified that all Heads of Departments in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak have contributed to forming more committed staff. According to Ali et al. (2016), transformational leadership is associated as the best leadership style in fostering staff organizational commitment. Therefore, adopting transformational leadership is one way of encouraging the staff in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak to always increase their level of involvement in the organization especially when dealing with difficult tasks. The result shown earlier signifies a good sign for the organization specifically Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak for having majority Heads of Departments practicing a high level of transformational leadership and generating high organizational commitment among the academic staff.

Moreover, transformational leaders who manage to keep the employees stay committed will create a more successful organization. This is because such leadership style has a direct influence on organizational performance because transformational leaders are known to be visionary, inspiring, daring, risk-takers and thoughtful thinkers (Gathungu et al., 2015). Since the relationship between both variables is significant, it could be advantageous for Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak in keeping its sustainability and helping to produce more skilled workers in the major fields of industry.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, both variables are seen as beneficial towards organizational success. Therefore, to enhance their transformational leadership style, proper training or programs are highly recommended. Some Heads of Departments might have their own opinions about changing their leadership style. Hence, through continuous training programs, they could slowly develop their transformational leadership style. Besides that, communication between the Heads of Departments and the academic staff is one important element to be maintained in order to build a more effective working environment particularly in building organizational commitment. Moreover,



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mediating factors like emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, extrinsic and intrinsic need should also be taken into consideration in making sure that transformational leaders contribute to the development of organisational commitment among employees. Proper career management could have also being a catch to both sides; Heads of Departments and the academic staffs. Hence, the organisation should not overlook this factor as continuance commitment play a very significant factor in enhancing organisational commitment.

It is hoped that the findings and discussions obtained from this study benefit organizational development especially in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak. Transformational leaders are seen as those capable of manipulating change and turn it into opportunity and this would lead to a more successful organization including polytechnics aimed at producing more skilled workers. This study is also important to counter problems such as staff attrition because it is not only about cost but most importantly it is a loss to the current organization when losing highly skilled academic staff. Losing them will be a huge disadvantage for an organization.

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