

“New Leadership”, Leader-Member Exchange and Commitment to Change: The Case of Higher Education in Malaysia

May-Chiun Lo, T. Ramayah, Ernest Cyril de Run, and Voon Mung Ling

Abstract—Human resource management faces challenges of bringing better fitted workers into the organizations and of meeting the workers’ needs and expectations. No known researches on leadership have been observed to empirically examine transformational and transactional leadership styles and its impact on the lecturers’ commitment to change in Malaysia higher education. Considering the potential cascading effect that leaders’ power can have on lecturers’ commitment, previous researches may have underestimated the impact of leadership styles on lecturers’ performance. Building upon social exchange theory which explains how power is gained and lost in the process of influence between an agent and the target, this paper hypothesized that the leadership styles of supervisors was anchored on 4 types of commitment to change of the subordinates. Transactional and transformational were conceptualized as 4- and 3- dimensional constructs, respectively. The findings suggested that several dimensions of leadership styles were found to have direct impact on organizational commitment to change. In addition, contribution respect dimension of leader-member exchange was found to have moderated the relationship between leadership styles and organizational commitment to change. This research is perhaps the first that contributes to management in general and Malaysian leadership and management in particular as it is the first to test lecturers’ commitment to change in this approach to leadership framework. Implications of the findings, potential limitations of the study, and directions for future research were further discussed.

Keywords—Commitment to change, transactional, transformational.

I. INTRODUCTION

LEADERSHIP is a process of interaction between leaders and subordinates where a leader attempts to influence the behavior of his or her subordinates to accomplish organizational goals (Yukl, 2005). In other words, leadership is described as the selection of bases of influence (Krause, 2004). It has been revealed that there is more conceptual

May-Chiun. Lo is with the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Sarawak (e-mail: mclo@feb.unimas.my).

T. Ramayah, is with the School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11900 Penang (e-mail: ramayah@usm.my).

Ernest Cyril de Run is with the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Sarawak (e-mail: dre Ernest@feb.unimas.my).

Voon Mung Ling is with the Swinburne University of Technology (e-mail: vmoon@swinburne.edu.my).

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confusion about influence processes than any other dimensions of leadership (Yukl, 2005). As suggested by Drucker (1999), organizations are now evolving toward structures in which rank denotes responsibility but not authority, and where the leader’s job is not to command, but to persuade. Although past researches on transformational and transactional leadership has been growing rapidly over the past 15 years, only a handful of studies have examined how these leadership behaviors are developed (Eid, Johnsen, Bartone, & Nissestad, 2008). Thus, there is a compelling demand to develop better ideas and strategies to improve the interface between employees and employers and to elaborate comprehensive insight that can help managers get better results and improved performance (Vigoda & Cohen, 2003).

It is undeniable that most universities’ reform initiatives assume significant capacity development on the part of individuals, as well as whole organizations. Hence, having higher levels of motivation and commitment from the workforce is important to solve the often complex problems associated with the universities’ implementation. Having said that, whether a reform initiative has subsequently improved the quality of education or simply become another failure hinges on the work of implementers. Teachers’ commitment plays a vital role and is known as the centre of school organizational reform (Kushman, 1992). Thus, it is important to know whether those providing leadership for reform in universities are capable of influencing lecturers’ commitment to change.

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Despite the enormous breadth of the literature on the relevance of power to organizational influence in general, and to an understanding of leadership in particular, research studies of leaderships, LMX and commitment to change are not well integrated. Having said that, a better understanding of these effects will offer insights into positively influencing lecturers' commitment such as creating high performance expectations, building collaborative structures, and strengthening universities' culture.

Most prior research focused on cases in Western countries and in private organizations, very few researches on leadership have focused on emerging economics such as Malaysia and particularly non has been researched on public universities, hence, it will be interesting to see the much different research results on leadership due to the huge difference in the market environment and the management practices between Western countries and Malaysia.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Blickle (2003) contended that, in order to be effective, it is critical for leaders to influence their subordinates and peers to assist and support their proposals, plans, and to motivate them to carry out with their decisions. 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. For the past two decades, several experts (such as Ansari, 1990; Ansari & Kapoor, 1987; Bhal & Ansari, 2000; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; Yukl & Tracey, 1992) have made substantial contribution to the understanding of the influence processes in the organizations where agents attempt to change the attitudes and obtain compliance from other persons (the targets) in the organizations.

Over the past two decades, transformational and transactional leaders' behaviors have been the primary focus of leadership theories (Powell, Butterfield & Bartol, 2008). Burns (1978) discussed leadership as transforming in which the leaders and the followers are often transformed or changed in performance and outlook. Further, the leader-follower interaction is known as the transformational influence process and it is also referred as transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

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 & Bass, 1991; Fairholm, 1991; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubrahmaniam, 1996; Stevens, D'Intino, & Victor, 1995). This implies that transformational leaders believed in sharing of formalized power and more often practice the use of personal power. Findings of Albulushi and Hussain (2008) also supported that when transformational leadership is practiced, team members believe that their leaders care for them rather than using them as a means to an end. 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 & Steidlmeier, 1999).

Transactional leadership involves contingent reinforcement where followers are motivated by their leaders' promises, rewards, and praises. At the same time, the leaders react to whether the followers carry out what the leaders and followers have "transacted" to do (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). This implies that subordinates who work under transactional leaders would have a greater power and the ability to affect the strength of a leader's influence, style of behavior, and the performance of the group (Hollander, 1993). 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.

Despite the importance of influencing subordinates for leadership effectiveness, leaders in universities are generally not aware of how influential they can be, or explicitly consider their leadership styles in achieving better performances. It is vital as it have important implications for management-development efforts, especially since leaders often need to influence and motivate subordinates; bring about commitment and extra effort, and most importantly to increase the performances of the universities.

On other hand, in order to explain ways to bridge a gap between leadership influencing styles and commitment to change, that is how leaders and followers gain and lost their power in the reciprocal influence processes, leader-member exchange theory (LMX) has been used to elaborate the relationship between an agent and target. Raven (1993) suggested that, an agent's choice of a particular influence strategy is based on his or her evaluation of the parameters of the agent-target relationship, including the relative status of each individual. As stated by Riggio and Reichard (2008), the development of high-functioning work teams requires strong interpersonal relationships with team members' cooperation to one another's attitudes and needs. Hence, drawing from LMX research, it can be asserted that the development of relationship between superiors and subordinates is critical to leader and managerial effectiveness (Uhl-Bien, 2003).

Social exchange theory has been applied to look at this framework in view of the fact that resource based theory has suggested that a firm's resources are extremely important for the firm's development and that human capital is a key resource of a firm. In addition to that, social exchange theory has also indicated that power relationship occurs naturally when people with different levels of potential power interact to accomplish organizational goals (Mossholder, Kemery, Bennett, & Wesolowski, 1998).

Thus, the goal of this study was three-fold: (a) to develop a better understanding of the meaning of leadership styles in the workplace and to suggest the effective use of transformational and transactional style (b) to explore the relationship between these two aspects of leadership styles and its impact on commitment to change in higher education in Malaysia, and (c) to draw conclusions on possible implications of these relationships for higher education learning in particular. The specific objectives of this study are:

- (i) to investigate to what extent do lecturers in higher education perceive their leaders to be exercising transformational or transactional leadership styles.
- (ii) to examine whether the quality of LMX significantly moderated leadership styles in predicting commitment to change; and
- (iii) to diagnose to what extent do lecturers' perceptions of leaders' transformational and transactional leadership explain variation in lecturers' change commitments.

This study attempts to establish an empirical relationship between these three constructs, namely, leadership styles and commitment to change, along with LMX, by integrating the literatures on these three constructs. In addition, this study aims in finding empirical evidence on the relationship between leadership styles, LMX, and commitment to change by lecturers by integrating the leadership styles differences, LMX, and commitment into a single framework.

The framework consists of three main constructs--the independent variables, moderators, and the dependent variable. The independent variables consist of two types of leadership, namely transformational and transactional, whereas the moderators are the four dimensions of LMX namely, contribution, affect, loyalty, and professional respect. The dependent variables are the four dimensions of commitment to change known as personal goals, capacity beliefs, context beliefs, and emotional arousal process.

Following research propositions are tested:

- H1: Transformational leadership styles such as individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, idealized influence is positively related to commitment to change such as personal goals, capacity beliefs, context beliefs, and emotional arousal process.*
- H2: Transactional leadership style such as contingent rewards, passive management-by exception, active management-by exception is negatively related to commitment to change such as personal goals, capacity beliefs, context beliefs, and emotional arousal process.*
- H3: Commitment to change will be higher with transformational leadership style and with high level of LMX.*
- H4: Commitment to change will be lower with transactional leadership style and with low level of LMX.*

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data was collected through survey questionnaires from targeted lecturers working in public universities in Malaysia using judgemental sampling method. 500 questionnaires were distributed to selected public universities. However, only 146 lecturers responded to the survey.

The measuring instrument for data collection from the

lecturers is in the form of questionnaires with a total of 73 close-ended questions and is divided into four sections. Section I requires the respondents to rate a total of 45 items on their superiors' leadership style using a 7-point Likert Scale as proposed by several researchers (e.g., Avolio & Bass, 2002; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Den Hartog, Van Muijen, & Koopman, 1997; Hinkin & Tracey, 1999) were used in this study as it still appears to be fairly representative and popular in application. Section II measures the quality of exchange between the subordinates and their supervisors. This study has adopted Liden and Maslyn's (1998) 12-item LMX scale with the dimensions of contribution, loyalty, affection, and respect, with 3 items being measured in each dimension. The researcher uses the LMX-MDM measurement as it has undergone reasonable psychometric testing and shown promising evidence of satisfactory reliability and validity. In Section III, commitment to change which was conceptualized as the functional equivalent of motivation and theories of motivation developed by Ford (1992) and Bandura (1986) are adapted to guide this research. The explanation for variation in lecturers' commitment to change, according to this formulation, can be tracked through four variables, namely, personal goals, capacity beliefs, context beliefs, and emotional arousal process. Finally, Section IV is used to collect the personal profile and demographic data of respondents.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Profile of the Respondents

Table I shows the demographic profile of the respondents.

The means and standard deviations among the study variables are contained in Table II. As shown in Table II, the standard deviations of the variables were either close to or exceeded 1.0, indicating that the study variables were discriminatory.

Table III 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 dimensions of transactional, transformational leadership styles, LMX, and organizational commitment have demonstrated acceptable levels of correlation.

TABLE I
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage
Subordinates' Gender	Male	80	54.8
	Female	66	45.2
Superiors' Gender	Male	92	63
	Female	44	30.1
	Missing	10	6.8
Status	Permanent	117	80.1
	Contract	29	19.9
Position	Tutor	9	6.2
	Lecturer	75	51.4
	Senior Lecturer	37	25.3
	Associate Professor	17	11.6
	Professor	8	5.5
Superiors' Education Background	Bachelor local	7	4.8
	Bachelor overseas	2	1.4
	Master local	55	37.7
	Master overseas	21	14.4
	PhD local	27	18.5
	PhD overseas	33	22.6
	Missing	1	0.7
University	UKM	52	35.6
	UPM	38	26
	UIA	33	22.6
	UM	18	12.3
	Missing	5	3.4
Faculty	Natural and Physical Science	32	21.9
	Engineering and Related Technology	3	2.1
	Architecture and Building	13	8.9
	Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies	6	4.1
	Health	3	2.1
	Education	9	6.2
	Management and Commerce	18	12.3
	Society and Culture	37	25.3
	Missing	25	17.1

TABLE II
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF THE STUDY

	Mean	Std Deviation
trancCR	5.4481	.90780
trancPA	5.7106	1.01612
trancAC	4.9829	.93295
transfII_IC	5.5178	.92358
transf_IM	5.0171	.91570
transf_IS	5.0023	.92102
comm_CB	5.5285	1.04522
comm_A_G	5.3450	.86464
comm_CONBE	5.2694	1.08300
lmx_1	5.3369	.96229
lmx_2	5.3253	1.10265

TABLE III
INTERCORRELATIONS OF THE STUDY VARIABLES

	trancCR	trancPA	trancAC	transfII_IC	transf_IM	transf_IS	comm_CB	comm_A_G	comm_CONBE	lmx_1	lmx_2
trancCR	1										
trancPA	.73 3(*)	1									
trancAC	.46 7(*)	.46 4(*)	1								
transfII_IC	.87 2(*)	.84 0(*)	.57 2(*)	1							
transf_IM	.55 8(*)	.56 2(*)	.77 0(*)	.65 4(*)	1						
transf_IS	.58 4(*)	.35 6(*)	.39 6(*)	.51 5(*)	.49 1(*)	1					
comm_CB	.68 1(*)	.60 7(*)	.28 7(*)	.61 9(*)	.42 6(*)	.35 6(*)	1				
comm_A_G	.60 3(*)	.51 4(*)	.27 1(*)	.52 3(*)	.43 2(*)	.34 8(*)	.69 8(*)	1			
comm_CONBE	.63 4(*)	.59 7(*)	.44 0(*)	.67 8(*)	.49 7(*)	.37 9(*)	.66 4(*)	.64 4(*)	1		
lmx_1	.71 1(*)	.65 9(*)	.43 9(*)	.72 5(*)	.52 4(*)	.43 7(*)	.58 4(*)	.57 7(*)	.57 7(*)	1	
lmx_2	.47 6(*)	.44 9(*)	.27 5(*)	.45 9(*)	.33 4(*)	.27 3(*)	.52 5(*)	.55 7(*)	.46 4(*)	.59 9(*)	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A 3-step hierarchical multiple regression analysis was carried out to test the hypotheses that comprised the direct and moderating effects of leadership styles, LMX and organizational commitment to change. Table IV, V, & VI present the results of the analyses

As noted in Table IV, the analysis on capacity belief of commitment to change revealed that the main effects on the criterion behavior were significant. Specifically, Step 2 was found to be significant on the contribution respect of LMX dimension. However, the interaction between leadership styles and LMX was not found to be significant in step 3. Therefore, LMX was not found to be a moderator for the relationships between leadership styles and capacity belief of commitment to change.

In Table V, Step 1, 2, and 3 were found to be significant ($p < .01$). Hence the direct effects of the predictors significantly explained 42% of the variability in personal goals arouse of commitment to change. Only two dimensions in leadership styles namely, contingent reward of transactional leadership styles, and inspirational motivation was found to be significantly related to personal goals arouse of commitment to change. This indicated that the interaction effects of leadership styles and LMX has added significant contribution in explaining the variation in personal goals arouse of commitment to change.

TABLE IV

HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION RESULTS USING LMX AS A MODERATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERSHIP STYLES AND CAPACITY BELIEF OF COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

Independent Variable	Std Beta Step 1	Std Beta Step 2	Std Beta Step 3
MODEL VARIABLES			
trancCR	.60**	.51**	.53
trancPA	.27*	.21*	.44
trancAC	-.16	-.16	-.42
transfII_IC	-.12	-.13	.40
transf_IM	.16	.15	-.79
transf_IS	-.045	-.05	.82
MODERATING VARIABLE			
Affect Loyalty (AL)		.06	.38
Contribution Respect (CR)		.22**	.32
INTERACTION TERMS			
trancCR*AL			.39
trancPA*AL			-2.13
trancAC*AL			.46
transfII_IC*AL			1.76
transf_IM*AL			2.08
transf_IS*AL			-.13**
trancCR*CR			-.54
trancPA*CR			1.57
trancAC*CR			-.13
transfII_IC*CR			-2.50
transf_IM*CR			-.33
transf_IS*CR			1.72
R ²	.50	.55	.61
Adj R ²	.49	.52	.54
R ² Change	.50	.05	.06
F Value	23.44**	6.47**	1.62

TABLE V

HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION RESULTS USING LMX AS A MODERATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERSHIP STYLES AND PERSONAL GOALS AROUSE OF COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

Independent Variable	Std Beta Step 1	Std Beta Step 2	Std Beta Step 3
MODEL VARIABLES			
trancCR	.63**	.49**	2.96**
trancPA	.22	.13	-.67
trancAC	-.18	-.18	-1.022
transfII_IC	-.29	-.31	-1.40
transf_IM	.30*	.27	.05
transf_IS	-.03	-.04	.08
MODERATING VARIABLE			
Affect Loyalty (AL)		.15	-.75
Contribution Respect (CR)		.29**	1.56**
INTERACTION TERMS			
trancCR*AL			-.99
trancPA*AL			1.23
trancAC*AL			1.93
transfII_IC*AL			-.31
transf_IM*AL			1.45
transf_IS*AL			-1.52
trancCR*CR			-4.13*
trancPA*CR			-.54
trancAC*CR			-.49
transfII_IC*CR			2.83
transf_IM*CR			-1.19
transf_IS*CR			1.38
R ²	.42	.50	.59
Adj R ²	.39	.47	.52
R ² Change	.41	.09	.08
F Value	16.22**	12.43**	2.08

In Table VI, Step 1, 2, and 3 were found to be significant ($p < .01$). The direct effects of the predictors namely, individualized consideration and idealized influence have significantly explained 48% of the variability in context belief of commitment to change. Contribution Respect dimension of LMX was found to have moderated the relationship between leadership styles and context belief of commitment to change.

This indicated that the interaction effects of leadership styles and LMX has added significant contribution in explaining the variation in context belief of commitment to change.

TABLE VI

HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION RESULTS USING LMX AS A MODERATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERSHIP STYLES AND CONTEXT BELIEF OF COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

Independent Variable	Std Beta Step 1	Std Beta Step 2	Std Beta Step 3
MODEL VARIABLES			
trancCR	.19	.12	.57
trancPA	.09	.05	-1.10
trancAC	.06	.05	-.18
transfII_IC	.37*	.36	1.63
transf_IM	.06	.05	-.90
transf_IS	-.01	-.01	.49
MODERATING VARIABLE			
Affect Loyalty (AL)		.06	-1.04
Contribution Respect (CR)		.16*	1.48**
INTERACTION TERMS			
trancCR*AL			.12
trancPA*AL			-.34
trancAC*AL			1.72
transfII_IC*AL			.95
transf_IM*AL			1.58
transf_IS*AL			-1.95*
trancCR*CR			-1.29
trancPA*CR			2.3
trancAC*CR			-1.47
transfII_IC*CR			-2.99
transf_IM*CR			.15
transf_IS*CR			1.11
R ²	.48	.50	.61
Adj R ²	.45	.47	.54
R ² Change	.48	.02	.11
F Value	21.07**	3.28*	2.84**

V. DISCUSSIONS

This research highlights the importance of leadership styles awareness as well as recognition of LMX as a valuable approach in order to achieve a better commitment to change. This study perhaps is the first that has systematically attempted to integrate various leadership styles and commitment to change with the presence of moderation of LMX. Exploring the phenomenon of transformational and transactional leadership styles among higher education learning in Malaysia has certainly broaden the understanding of these two leadership styles on commitment to change. Without a doubt the research on leadership styles and change commitment are still limited in its ability to provide an unequivocal guideline and to advise on the best way to exercise their power. However, by drawing upon the diverse literatures, this study has inevitably developed some guidelines for scholars as well as leaders on the effective use of new leadership styles.

The statistical results have indicated a positive direct relationship between two dimensions of transactional

leadership style, namely contingent reward, passive management by exception and two dimensions of transformational leadership style known as inspirational motivation and individualize consideration with commitment of change. 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 leaders. However, the findings of this study have suggested that transactional leaders are more able to achieve better commitment to change than transformational leaders.

In addition to that, contribution respect dimension of LMX was found to have moderated the relationship between leadership styles and all dimensions of commitment to change. This finding seems logical that an employee's attachment with the supervisor resulting from continuing reciprocal exchanges and respects over time will result in subordinates' commitment to change. As stated by Bhal and Ansari (2007), high quality exchanges would lead to a perception of procedural justice and having said that, subordinates will be more committed and to accept changes. In addition to that, enhancing work related interaction through guiding coaching or delegation could further result in higher-level employee outcome (Bauer & Green, 1996), and hence, the use of coercive power is not required to force subordinates to change. Bhal (2006) posited that, it is very important for the leaders to be seen as fair and transparent, in view of the fact that if justice is being experienced by members, the effect of in/group or out/group memberships becomes not important. Research by Vigoda-Gadot (2007) have concluded that better performances can be achieved when there is a reasonable level of expectation-fit and when the social exchange between supervisors and subordinates is fair and equal. Hence, this implied that quality of LMX does affect supervisors' leadership styles especially when it comes to subordinates' commitment to change.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

Findings from this study will have several implications. This study has advanced current knowledge on leadership styles on commitment to change in higher education in Malaysia. In addition, the results of this study has revealed the important link between leadership styles, LMX on lecturers' commitment to change, and has enhanced further the understanding and differences of the leadership styles between various public university on commitment to change. LMX was found to have moderated the commitment to change and recognized superiors' leadership styles might be effective in creating their perceptions of fairness in outcomes and assist in decision making in the organizations. It is believed that this study have added value to the literatures on Malaysia higher education leadership styles especially in the Malaysian settings since there were limited literatures done on similar setting.

VII. CONCLUSION

This research has highlighted the importance of leadership styles awareness as well as recognition of LMX as a valuable approach in order to achieve a better commitment to change. The results have found that transformational leaders would be able to motivate subordinates to perform as expected but transactional leaders would have the capacity to stir subordinates to level of performance exceeding expectation.

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