School Principal Leadership Styles and Teacher Organizational Commitment among Performing Schools

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ABSTRACT

School efficiency and effectiveness are relate and influenced by principal leadership styles. However, it is unsure whether principal leadership has direct impact on teacher organizational commitment resulting in school performance. This study attempts to investigate the effects of principle leadership styles on teacher organizational commitment among performing schools in the state of Perak, Malaysia. Data were collect from 240 teachers from 19 performing schools using a fixed-alternative questionnaire. The data collected were analyses by analytical software called SmartPLS. It was founds that transformational leadership (TF) has a significant positive impact on affective commitment (AC) and continuance commitment (CC) but not on normative commitment (NC). Transactional leadership (TS) has a significant positive impact on AC only, and not on CC and NC while nurturant leadership (NT) has significant impact on AC and NC only and not on CC. Therefore, the most influential leadership style in performing schools is TF while NT is perceives to be the most common leadership style by the teachers.

Keywords: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, nurturant leadership, teacher organizational commitment, school performance

INTRODUCTION

School efficiency and students achievement are directly influenced by principal effectiveness (Harris et al. 2003). Studying the behaviors and leadership styles of the school principals allows school management to examine and apply the findings and results to their respective schools. School effectiveness is easier to achieve by motivated and committed teachers, while less committed teachers can bring undesirable adverse effects that can be financially costly. In the West, leadership emphasizing participation is commonly accepted but may not be applicable to the culturally collectivistic East. Principals in Malaysian schools are bounded socially and culturally whereby leaders are expected to be humble, modest and dignified (Dorfman et al., 2004). Principal leadership styles and their navigating style are crucial in influencing teachers’ commitment. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between these two variables; the principals’ leadership styles and the teachers’ organizational commitment with the hope of discovering insights to improve school performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies by Abdul (2005), Sabariah et al. (2008) and Cheah (2008) mainly focused on teachers’ commitments caused by principal leadership traits. Researchers such as Avolio (1999) and Bass (1998)
found that transformational (TF) leaders tend to generate higher follower commitment as compared to transactional (TS) leadership or lazier faire leadership. Jung and Sosik (2002), Foels, et al (2000), Geijsel et al. (2003), Blase & Blase (2003) and Jones et al. (2007), further suggest that TF leadership is the type of leadership that subordinates have in mind when they describe their ideal leader. In the case of nurturant (NT) leadership, leaders have the responsibilities to instill positive work values beside his affection, personal care, and warmth for the subordinates before he or she can lead. The NT caring attitude will in return strengthen the subordinates’ sense of competence and self-sufficiency. Subordinates eventually will reduce the salience of dependency, personalized relationship, and status differentials among the leader-follower relationship. These eventually allow his subordinates to look for more freedom, autonomy and more recognition and to contribute to the task (Sinha, 1980).

Most teachers’ feel more committed to their tasks when principals are able to create work communities that are supportive and stimulating, student-oriented, facilitate feelings of community, and foster their feelings of efficacy. Principals with poor and inefficient leadership and tender less administrative support may force many teachers to leave their teaching profession (Fiore, 2004). Greenlee (2007) agrees with Carr (1997), and asserts that frustration and dissatisfaction among teachers is rooted in their lack of understanding of the school functions beyond the classroom, such as budgeting, scheduling, and so on. At the same time, it seems that many administrators lacked the knowledge to be curriculum and instructional leaders, and this lack could hinder schools from becoming high performers.

Yu et al. (2002) find that there is a weak but significant effect of TF leadership on teachers’ commitment to change and reform. This finding confirms the results of Geijsel et al. (2003) which demonstrated that TF leadership has significant impact on teachers’ commitment to school reform. School principal TF leadership tends to influence the teachers’ level of commitment and engagement with new initiatives (Mohamad, 2008; Day, 2000; Fullan, 2002; Louis, 1998). In addition, studies by Day (2000), Fullan (2002), Louis (1998), Yu, et al (2002) and Geijsel, et al (2003) also demonstrated that TF leadership has significant influence on teachers’ commitment to school reform as compared with other types of leadership styles. School principals who practice TF leadership can bring about supports for teaching and learning (Prestine & Nelson, 2005). Thus, effective school leadership is crucial to establish and maintain connections between new educational ideas and teachers’ organizational commitment and ideological frameworks (Bennis & Townsend, 2005). In any educational institution, leadership is the central and most effective factor required to enhance teacher commitment (Bennis & Nanus, 2003 and Lambert, 2002).

Many authors agree that organizational commitment is a multidimensional construct (Becker, Rangal & Riegel, 1995; Bateman & Strasser, 1984). Meyer and Allen (1987) developed a commitment model that comprises three dimensions: affective, continuance and normative. Later, Allen and Meyer (1991) proved that attitudinal commitment of affective, continuance and normative components are conceptual and empirically separated. McShane and Von Glinow (2010) define affective commitment (AC) as “the employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in a particular organization” (p. 112), while continuance commitment (CC) is “the employee’s calculative attachment to the organization, whereby the employee is motivated to stay only because leaving would be costly” (p. 112). In addition, Meyer and Allen (1991) state that normative commitment (NC) is the employee’s feeling of obligation to stay in the organization based on one’s personal norms and moral values.

Based on literature review and other readings, it is believed that the leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and nurturant) are respectively related to the three dimensions of
organizational commitment (affective, continuance, and normative) in school management and academic work environments. Therefore, the study propose the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 below.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The independent variable in this study is principal leadership styles whereas the dependent variable is teachers’ organizational commitments. The premise is that the leadership styles of the school principals will significantly influence the teachers’ organizational commitment. The study believes that the leadership styles exhibited by the school principals will have particular impact on the respective dimensions of organizational commitment.

![Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework.](image)

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted the quantitative approach and the research design is causal in nature. As the objective is to examine the influence of principal leadership style on teacher organizational commitment, the data collection strategy used was the questionnaire survey. A questionnaire was specifically designed to collect data on two main constructs: leadership styles and organizational commitment. The MLQ-5X leadership questionnaire developed by Avolio and Bass (2004) was used to measure two leadership styles: transformational and transactional leadership. The nurturant leadership style was measured using the items suggested by Sinha (1980). The items used to measure the three dimensions of organizational commitment were adopted from Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Allen and Meyer (1996).

The first 19 top-ranked performing schools in the state of Perak with more than 90% passes in PMR public examinations (Junior High) were chosen. These schools with a rating on Average School Grade Index (ASGI) or Gred Purata Sekolah between 1.03 to 2.05 points were selected for this study (Grade A=1, Grade B=1.01-1.99, Grade C=2-2.99, Grade D=3-3.99 and Grade E=4). Two hundreds and eighty-five questionnaires were distributed to these 19 schools. Fifteen lower secondary teachers from each of these schools were targeted to complete the questionnaires. These teachers are directly involved in the teaching and learning process and have the first-hand experience of their organizational commitment influenced by their principals’ leadership styles. Two hundred and forty teachers from the targeted schools responded to the survey and they ranged from normal teachers to senior assistants. The response rate at 84.21% (240/285) was well above the response rate required as suggested by Dilman (2000, 1978). According to Dilman (2000, 1978), at least a minimum of 50% in return rate is required for a survey using mailed method to maintain its validity.
FINDINGS

The data collected by the survey was analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM) software called SmartPLS. The SmartPLS uses partial least square (PLS) technique to construct and evaluate theoretical models. The result of the analysis is in the following tables:

- Table 1 - Composite reliability, Convergent, Discriminant validity and average variance extracted (AVE)
- Table 2 - Means of constructs for performing schools
- Table 3 - Structural Model - Principal Leadership Styles on Teachers’ Commitment

Figure 2 and Figure 3 are attached as Appendix A and Appendix B:

- Figure 2 - Path Analysis for principal leadership styles and teacher organizational commitment for performing schools
- Figure 3 - Significance level for path analysis for principal leadership styles and teacher organizational commitment of performing schools

Table 1 shows that the composite reliability, convergent, discriminant validity and average variance extracted (AVE) were all well above the required threshold value.

### Table 1: Composite Reliability, Convergent and Discriminant Validity for Leadership Styles and Organizational Commitment Component.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Construct</th>
<th>Composite Reliability ≥ 0.7</th>
<th>AVE should be ≥ than 0.5</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>TF</th>
<th>TS</th>
<th>Cronbachs α should be ≥ 0.7</th>
<th>Communalit should be ≥ 0.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>0.922</td>
<td>0.627</td>
<td>0.792</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.900</td>
<td>0.627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TF</td>
<td>0.916</td>
<td>0.550</td>
<td>0.717</td>
<td>0.741</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.898</td>
<td>0.550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS</td>
<td>0.843</td>
<td>0.642</td>
<td>0.440</td>
<td>0.458</td>
<td>0.801</td>
<td>0.725</td>
<td>0.642</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commitment Construct

| AC       | 0.824 | 0.540 | 0.735 | | | 0.715 | 0.540 |
| CC       | 0.846 | 0.581 | 0.149 | 0.762 | | 0.775 | 0.581 |
| NC       | 0.836 | 0.633 | 0.477 | 0.311 | 0.795 | 0.720 | 0.633 |

Note:

- Composite Reliability (CR) = (square of the summation of the factor loadings)/{(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (square of the summation of the error variances)}
- Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = (summation of the square of the factor loadings)/{(summation of the square of the factor loadings) + (summation of the error variances)}

Table 2 below shows the highest mean score for the performing schools is affective commitment (AC) (mean=2.19) and the highest mean score for leadership style is nurturant leadership (NT) (mean=3.60).

### Table 2: Means of constructs for performing schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performing schools</th>
<th>AC</th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>NC</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>TS</th>
<th>TF</th>
<th>NT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership styles</td>
<td>Teachers; Commitment Domain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>-------------------</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affective Commitment (AC)</td>
<td>Continuance Commitment (CC)</td>
<td>Normative Commitment (NC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational (TF)</td>
<td>0.289***</td>
<td>0.279***</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional (TS)</td>
<td>0.125**</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturant (NT)</td>
<td>0.139*</td>
<td>-0.080</td>
<td>0.279***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R² P by TS,TF &amp; NT</td>
<td>0.218</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.171</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* significant at p 0.05
** significant at p 0.01
*** significant at p 0.001

**DISCUSSIONS**

TF had the strongest regression weight on AC that accounted for 0.289 followed by CC at 0.279 for these performing schools. With the $\beta$ value, TF leadership style is considered to be able to predict AC and CC among the respondents. This supports findings from previous studies such as Bass (1998), Avolio (1999), Foels, et al. (2000), Yu, et al. (2002), Jung & Sosik (2002) and Geijsel, et al. (2003), in that, TF leaders tend to generate higher commitment from followers. Therefore, TF leadership has great impact on teachers’ organizational commitment as compared with TS and NT leadership. The finding is in line with that of previous studies conducted locally by Abdul (2005), Sabariah et al. (2008) and Cheah (2008).

The analysis further indicates that TS leadership had impact only on AC. TS indeed has predictive value only on AC. Refering to Table 4 above, with 1 unit increases in TS will drive up 0.125 unit (p 0.01) in AC. The relationships between TS toward CC and NC are not significant. Certain schools need TS leadership to maintain its status quo performance. These principals need to think outside the box even though TS type of leadership suppresses creativities and knowledge-based works. The path coefficient ($\beta$) between NT and AC are statistically significant (p<0.05) followed by NT with NC (p 0.001). In another words, NT leadership can significantly predict the variations in AC and NC but not on CC. In addition, this paths analysis shows that NT leadership style has the most influence on teachers’ AC and NC. Although the study introduce this type of leadership for the first time in teaching profession, it seem that NT leadership do conveys some empirical significant influences on Malaysian teachers organizational commitment.

By regressing the 3 leadership styles on AC, the R² value for AC is 0.218 but significant (p 0.01). This means that the 3 leadership styles: TF, TS, and NT can significantly explain up to 21.8% of variances in AC in performing schools. The R² value for CC is only 0.057 which means that the three leadership styles can only explain 5.7% of the variances in CC. In addition, the three leadership styles can explained up to 17.1% of the variances in NC (R²=0.171). According to Falk and Miller (1992), R² must be at least, 0.10 or 10% in order for the latent construct to be adequate. Therefore, only AC and NC are deems adequate and fulfill the requirements.

Based on the results, continuance commitment (CC) can only be significantly predicts by TF, and not with TS and NT. The “sunk” cost or “non-transferable” investments that teachers may have to forfeit if they move to another school are the primary reason for CC. This “non-transferable” investment may have built up over time and at the same encouraged by the principal TF leadership style. Teachers who perceive that the costs of leaving in the present school are greater than the costs of staying remain tend to exhibit higher level of CC. Anything that increases the cost associated with leaving the organization can lead to the development of CC. Teachers who leave the present school will result a greater loss of the valuable resources spent in the present organization. This consideration of the cost of leaving and the cost
of staying put, coupled with the transferability of job skills and knowledge among the governmental aided schools may lead to non significant $\beta$ between TS and CC, and NT and CC.

Normative commitment (NC) which refer to teacher’s sense of loyalty and sense of duty to the schools (ought to) is only significantly related to nurturant leadership (NT). NC, according Meyer and Allen (1996), develops result of normative beliefs that internalized through pre-entry (familial and cultural) and post entry (organizational) socialization processes. The NT leadership style cares for his or her subordinates, sows affection, takes personal interest in their well-being and above all, is committed to the subordinates’ growth. The uniqueness of this NT leadership style is the priority attached to productivity over job satisfaction. The results confirmed that there are strong positive relationships between NT and AC and NT and NC.

**IMPLICATIONS**

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the relations between principle leadership styles and the different dimensions of teacher organizational commitment of performing schools. This is to allow insights and meaningful findings from the study to be uses to improve school performance. The most useful dimension of organizational commitment appears to be affective commitment (AC) as it involves a sense of emotional and voluntary attachment to the schools.

The study confirmed that all three types of principal leadership styles (TF, TC and NT) could be used to predict teachers’ AC significantly. The Malaysian Education Ministry has always advocated for policies to cultivate and nurture better commitment among the schoolteachers toward their schools. This is especially so for cultivating affective commitment (AC) among the teachers. Irrespective of what type of leadership styles of the principals, this policy may indeed help to cultivate teachers’ psychological attachment toward their schools. With a higher level of AC and the teachers’ emotional attachment and strong identification with their schools, the teachers are more prepared to sacrifice their time and efforts for the beneficial effects of their school. They want to continue to teach in the schools because their ACs are high. As their ACs increase, the teachers are more willing to offer more efforts and time to their schools. This is good ingredient for reforming schools and execution of transforming programs.

Notwithstanding the popularity of the TF leadership style to instil organizational commitment among the teachers, the most common leadership style practised by the principals of the performing schools is that of the NT leadership style. This means that the efforts of school management encouraging TF leadership style among the principals are not really effective. However, the ability of the NT leadership style to instil all dimensions of organisational commitment significantly, be it AC, CC or NC is appropriate for improving school performance. Therefore, the NT caring leadership style should continue to be encouraged among the principals of performing schools as well as for non-performing schools. In addition, the NT leadership style should work well in the collegiality environment of school management.

**CONCLUSION**

TF leadership style plays an important predictor role on teacher’s organizational commitment. This type of leaders have the ability to generate enthusiastic synergy, able to take risk when ever encounter obstacles, cultivate creativity, ad vocative and collaborative. Principals with this type of leadership style may entails individualized consideration and always ignite inspirational motivation among their
subordinates and idealized their influences. In addition, the NT leadership style is another predictor for teachers’ organizational commitment. As the teaching profession became more vibrant and challenging, TS leaders’ style of leading is facing out in due time (refer to low overall regression weight as compare to TF and NT). With NT’s ability to predict AC and NC significantly, the conclusion is that the principals in these performing schools should show interests in the work-life of the teachers so that teachers are more emotional attached and have a strong sense of loyalty and duty to their schools. This augers well for school effectiveness and performance.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

The scope of this study is limited to; i) the secondary school in the state of Perak ii) the study can only be generalized to principal leadership and teacher commitment on the respective areas as stated. iii) findings can only be generalized to secondary performing schools (even though the results can serve as an indicator for further research). For future research, it is recommends that the research should be extends to the wider national scope for a more comprehensive and representative study.

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APPENDIX A

PERFORMING SCHOOLS TSTFNT VS ACCCNC PATH ANALYSIS

Figure 2: Path Analysis for principal leadership styles and teacher organizational commitment for performing schools

APPENDIX B

PERFORMING SCHOOLS TSTFNT VS ACCCNC T TEST

Figure 3: Significance level for path analysis for principal leadership styles and teacher organizational commitment