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Does transformational leadership style foster commitment to change? The case of higher education in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of transformational leadership style on employees' organizational commitment to change in Malaysia higher education context. Recently there has been a wave of changes due to the ranking system issue whereby Malaysian universities have not been able to break into the top 200 universities in the world. A total of 458 lecturers voluntarily participated in this study. The findings suggested that two dimensions of transformational leadership style namely, idealized influence and inspirational motivation were found to have positive relationship with personal commitment to change. Implications of the findings are further discussed.

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Keywords: Transformational; leadership; commitment to change; higher education.

1. Introduction

In response to these potential problems, many forward-thinking organizations are striving to create a positive organizational climate in order to keep those good employees through various human resource management initiatives (Chew & Chan, 2008). Extensive research is available in the organizational behavior literature investigating the process of leadership style and organizational commitment to change. But the two constructs- leadership style and organizational commitment to change seem to have been examined almost independently. This is particularly true in the Malaysian context. Some researchers have speculated that supervisory behavior may have an impact upon subordinates' perceptions of supervisory power. According to Elangovan and Xie (2000), organizations nowadays are multifunctional teams moving along a horizontal structure where it is vital to fully understand the employees' perceptions of supervisors' power. Subordinates have been given considerable autonomy to set goals and evaluate output, which used to be the traditional role of supervisors. In fact, organizations have reengineered themselves to be more efficient and therefore no longer practice the traditional corporate hierarchy, thus pushing more decision making to lower level management. These new workplace trends stress the importance of developing and expanding the roles of followers in the leadership of organization. These trends also rationalized the willingness of leaders to embrace the notion of sharing power with subordinates. When a minority opinion is attributed to an out group member, it can influence individuals who are in the majority