SCHOOL PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP STYLES AND TEACHERS ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT. A RESEARCH AGENDA

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ABSTRACT

This research served the intention of examining the relationship between perceptions of principal leadership styles and teachers' organizational commitment between performing and underperforming schools as well as to identify the leaders' gender as a moderating variable. Other influential factors including teacher age, position tenure, years of experiences, religion and educational level as suggested by previous researches are being investigated in this study to further clarify this relationship. Three domains of leadership styles namely Transformational, Transactional and Nurturant were apply. The former and later types of leadership were chosen was based on the concept of "Caring Societal" which the MOE trying to instill in our educational scenario. Teachers' commitment was examined using questionnaires developed by Meyer and Allen's (1997). Gender of principals is added to serve as a moderating effect on this relationship which is basically based on this pre-dominant Muslim society where the preferably leadership gender is still male.

Keywords for Leadership: Transformational, Transactional, Nurturant.
Keywords for Commitment: Affective (AC), Continuance (CC) and Normative (NC).

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Current educational reform places a great premium upon the relationship between effective leadership and school improvement. Effective leader exercise an indirect but powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school and will aid in teachers commitment and ultimately the students overall achievement. Ironically, teacher's organizational commitment was the solution for transforming an ailing school to an effective's school. This lack of research into various types of teacher commitment is in part a consequence of the fact that teachers and other educational workers are tightly clustered within schools and institutions, and it has not been possible until recently to take this clustering within schools and institutions into consideration in the analysis of data.

1.1 Background of the Study

The Education Development Master Plan for Malaysia (2001-2010), henceforth referred to as the Blueprint, takes into account the goals and aspirations of the National Vision Policy to develop the potentials of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced in line with the National Education Philosophy. With the propagandized slogan, "Education is Human Right" and "Malaysian Education is For All", Malaysia has achieved significant improvements in enrolment and literacy levels through various implementation of strategies:

Primary education:
- More than 96% of primary-aged children were enrolled in school in 2005.
- There are no significant gender disparities in primary enrolment rate.
- The percentage of children who enter Year One and successfully reach Year Six had improved from 96.7% in 1989 to 98.1% in 2005.

Secondary education:
- Secondary education enrolment rates increased steadily during the previous decades but have now leveled out.
- In 2005, the Net Enrolment Rate for girls was 81%, while the rate for boys was significantly lower, at 77%.
- Learning achievements are above the international benchmarks in international comparisons, when measured for achievements in mathematics and science among eight-grade students.

Literacy levels:
- According to the 2000 Census, more than 91% of the populations (above 10 years who were attending or had attended school) are literate.

(Source: UNICEF Malaysia Communications.5 Aug 2008)

With these it is anticipate that teachers who work under such background will be able to bestow their best efforts and commitment in educating our generation. Thus, this will help to transform a non performing school to a more performing one or at least to an encouraging level.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Schools today must be able to prepare students to raise the capacity for knowledge and innovation, and nurture "first class mentality". Our current educational system still fails to meet the needs of every child and resulting in many un-solving quandaries that lead to "Parkinson's Chain" problems (The Star, 24/12/2011). Most of these problems have a direct relationship with principal leadership and teacher commitment. Today, due to increasing demands from all quarter, the traditionally recognized roles and responsibilities of teachers have been redefined. In order to effectively carry out this added roles and responsibilities, teachers' commitment or attachment to their job and workplace should be an important factor for school to focus on quality and world class teaching. The issue surrounding teachers' commitment should be of utmost importance to principals for retaining talented human capital. While principals who are over-worked and under pressure to improve student achievement, and on the other hand, teachers' grievances are some of the ever unsolved problems in education which proliferated into stumbling block between the interaction of principal and teachers. Instead of relying on the perception of these variables based on our own interpretation, intuition and gossips, there is a pressing need for researchers to investigate further into these variables by means of a well designed survey.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The MOE has repeatedly promulgated to make Malaysia the regional center for quality education and to create a world class educational system. This aim could only be realized if schools focus on strategic planning that expands their capacity and capability to face the challenges of the 21st century. As school education becomes more and more

complex, good leadership and effective teachers with commitment are essential to bring about greater improvement and better student achievement. An examination of principals' leadership styles in these emerging educational trends would allow current and future administrators to examine the type of leadership style is most effective in these dynamic schools and ever changing world. Accomplish by teacher commitment will lead our future generation to a greater height in this region. The purpose of this study was to assist school administrators and educational researchers in identifying various effective leadership styles and traits of school principals to nurture and enhance teacher commitment. It further investigates the relationship between principals' leadership styles and their genders that affecting teachers' commitment. To further complete the suggestion of previous researchers, this study will look through other factors that will serve as influencing variables.

1.4 Significant of the Study.

The National Council of Principal (2005) acknowledges among its members that one significant factor contributed to educational disastrous scenario is the leadership style of its own members. This statement magnified the significant of this study that the critical success leadership behaviors in maneuver teachers' organizational commitment. Malaysian educational sector receives approximately RM 30 billion from Malaysian 2010 Budget, an extortionate amount that deserves to be carried out this research in order to shade the ambiguous and postulated perception in the eyes of the general public and tax payers in particular (Hartmann,2000). The never ending of endeavor researches will remain significantly important in the light of the changing role of the principal and numerous undesirable adverse effects on school effectiveness as the consequences with teachers displaying low commitment. Evidence from this study could serve as an empirical framework for MOE and Institute Amiruddin Bakri (IAB), to plan, reorganize and provide leadership-training program for our school leaders and prospective leaders. In addition remind school principals to take heed of their leadership behavior and more sensitive to human interaction. By then, both principals and teachers will set sail with the harmonious wind to their destiny.

1.5 Delimitations and Limitation of Study

Since the research on principal leadership styles and its influence on teachers organization commitment is a progressive and dynamic in nature, never ending queries and findings are the only source to the answer. Therefore, the scope of this study is delimitated to the state of Perak. The study only includes public daily secondary schools in Perak, where these schools are facing administrative and academic problems. This research omits the fully residential and clustered schools on basic presumptions that these schools are out of the problematic level and strictly under surveillance by the education department. Therefore, the findings on this research are only applicable to what criterions had stated. The results of this study may not be generalized to private schools, institution, colleges, religious schools, boarding schools and others other then stated.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Malaysian Culture, Gender Stereotype and Leadership Styles.

The enigma of leadership is even more fascinating, complex and daunting if looked at through a cross culture lens. Leadership emphasizing participation, which is commonly accepted in the individualistic West, is questionable effectiveness in the collectivistic East. Malaysian leaders are no exception and expected to be humble, modest and dignified (Dorfman, 2004). Although numerous studies of effective leadership style for leaders either in political, educational, industrial and management have been undertaken in the past, interviews conducted by practitioners and indications identified through literature review revealed that the leadership styles that were perceived to be effective in the Malaysian context formerly may no longer bear significance in the current scenario (Sharmala, J., & Moey. 2009). Fundamentally, Malaysians perceive their superior (leaders) to be effective if they display a personalized and flexible leadership style. Another pertinent finding revealed through research done in the last few years further

confirmed subordinates who perceived their leaders to be effective readily divulged that they feel more respect towards their superior and therefore were willing to exert more effort to achieve the objectives set.

Malaysians generally give more preferences to the group as a unit of collectivist society. Collectivist cultures value group goals, group concerns, and collective needs over individual concerns (Hofstede, 2001). Our culture emphasized on harmonious relationships or most Malaysian refers as "Polite system": hence many leaders shudder at giving negative feedback to their subordinates even it is the truth (Ansari, et al., 2004, p.115). According to Pfeifer and Love (2004) most universal theories of leadership fail to account for cultural context. He further defined that most commonly; past researchers describe the behaviour of leaders in one particular country especially the United States. These theories are largely inadequate to explain or predict leadership across cultures, especially those in the unique multicultural context of Malaysia (Peterson & Hunt, 1997).

In this multi-culture, multi theories and competitive model of leaderships, the inclusion of the three behaviors models of leadership (Transformational, Transactional and Nurturant) in this research is vital to prevent error of omission. Leaders in a high context culture like Malaysia have to spend time in building personal relationship that may transcend the workplace. There is an unwritten code governing relations and differentiating peers, superiors and subordinates. As a result maintaining relationships is much more important than performing a task which basically contractual in the west (Phoon, 1998; Abdullah, 1991; Hofstede, 1991 cited in Mahfooz et.al, 2004). Senior (superiors or elders) are respected and obeyed. They are usually the decision makers and the subordinates are obliged to implement. Societal norm dictates that juniors do not agree with seniors and in return the superiors are obliged to provide patronage (Sinha, 1979). This hierarchical relationship is maintained through "affective reciprocity", thus fostering dependency. Mahfooz et.al, (2004) further found that Malays are slightly more hierarchy-oriented toward building relationships with the sense of responsibility to help friends, relatives and neighbors through networks that are not necessarily business related. The Chinese, on the other hand, prefer to incorporate business dealings into hierarchical relationships and the Indians like participation.

Another prominent issue in leadership style is gender differences. Although women leaders are always perceived to bring care and concern as well as intelligence into the school community (Kettle, 1997., Fennell, 1999 and Grogan, 1999). Women view the job of a principal as that of a master teacher or educational leader while men are more likely to view the job from a managerial-industrial perspective. The Statistics on Women, Family and Social Welfare in year 2006 showed that women at decision making level are still far behind as compare to the pre-dominant male counterpart even though they are performing better than men (Manjulika, Gupta and Rajinder, 1998). This report further clarified that there were still gender-based stereotypes highlighted by Oakley (2000) in this pre-dominant Muslim majority country.

A School principal is expected to cultivate and communicate a vision to teachers, students, and the community. These essential works involves constructing at least a preliminary view of the school organization, and engaging the community in the process of developing a shared or common vision for the future. The principal must change schools into caring, responsible, knowledge rich, competent centers of the community where students are free to learn and will learn.

Today, school principal duties in Malaysia go beyond traditional mandate. The principal wears many hats being manager, administrator, instructional leader, curriculum leader as well as paternally responsibilities at different time of a day (McNulty, et.al.2005). Past researches which found that effective schools usually had principals who stressed the importance of instructional leadership (Brookover and Lezotte, 1982). Later, in the first half of the 90s, "attention to instructional leadership seemed to waver, displaced by discussions of school-based management and facilitative leadership" (Lashway, 2002, p.1). Recently, various types of leadership (transformational, transactional and lately the nurturant) has made questionable comeback with increasing importance placed on academic standards and the need for schools in Malaysia to be accountable (Azlin,2006 and Foo,2003).

In this study Transformational leadership refer to a true leader who inspires his or her subordinates with a shared vision of the future. Very highly visible, good communicating, not necessary lead in front, delegate responsibilities, enthusiastic, risk taking, creativity, advocative and collaborative, entails individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence on subordinates. This leadership style is the most dominant style taught in the "How to Lead; Discover the leader within you". For Transactional leadership, it required members to obey their leader totally when they take a job on: the "transaction" is (usually) that the organization pays the team members, in return for their effort and compliance. As such, the leader has the right to "punish" team members if their work doesn't meet the pre-determined standard. Alternatively a transactional leader could practice "management by exception", whereby, rather than rewarding better work, he or she would take corrective action if the required standards were not met. Transactional leadership is really just a way of managing rather a true leadership style, as the focus is on short-term tasks. It has serious limitations for knowledge-based or creative work, but remains a common style in many organizations. The Nurturant leadership refers to leading means more than serving. Before leading, the leader must cater to the needs and expectations of the subordinates. Only then will the subordinates follow the directives. However they must not stop at meeting the subordinates' needs and keeping them happy. They must lead them. Only then can they be called effective. That means "leading: part of the role requires the leader to be task oriented. In the same vein, the Nuturant leader cares for his or her subordinates, shows affection, takes personal interest in their well being and above all, is committed to their growth. Once the subordinates reach a reasonable level of maturity, they generate pressure on the leader to shift to the participative style, the Nurturant style is considered to be a forerunner of the participative style in the reciprocal influence processes between a leader and his/her subordinates. The uniqueness of the Nuturant model is the priority attached to productivity over job satisfaction.

The impacts of globalization involve rapid diffusion of educational ideas and policies. As Malaysia steps into this mega trends, it cannot be exceptional but providing quality education for the future generation. To face this rapid changing world, our generation had to be well trained and equipped with sufficient skills and knowledge. Therefore, managing school nowadays need different approaches and principals need to emphasize various leadership styles at different point of the day (Ross, 2006., Lope,P., Zaidatol, A. Elias and Habibah. 2001).

Generally speaking, management and leadership perspectives are not fixed entities; they evolve and develop because of continuous research, although the range of the change may vary from one context to another. In the field of education, management and leadership are subjected to rapid and complex change. This is partially because they are still developing and new theories and perspectives are changing assumptions and expectations. In addition, the academic field itself necessarily reflects leadership and management practices which are powerfully affected by other imperatives. Leadership theory evolved in this direction over the course of time. It moved from charismatic leadership and traits theory to more extensive and holistic perspectives taking into consideration leadership behaviour and organizational processes as well as interactions between the leader and subordinates.

2.2 Teachers' Organizational Commitment and It Influencing Variables.

Cohen (2007) defined commitment is the tantamount to tendency toward continuance activity on the basis of person's diagnosis about cost that are related to organization abandonment. This construct seeks to explain consistencies involving attitudes, beliefs and behaviour and "involves behavioural choices and implies a rejection of feasible alternative courses of action" (Hulin, 1991, p. 488). Basically Allen and Mayer (Meyer & Allen, 1997,1991; Jaros, 1997; Meyer & Smith, 2000; Meyer & Heroscvitch, 2001; Powell & Meyer, 2004) classified commitment into 3 discrete components:

i. Affective commitment; based on emotion attachment and arises when individual strongly identifies with, is involved in and enjoys membership in organization (**want to)**.
ii. Continuance commitment is calculative, as it perceives that there is a profit to be gained from participation and a cost to leaving (**need to)**.
iii. Normative commitment, on the other hand, is obligation based and it arises out of an employee's sense of loyalty and sense of duty to the organization (**ought to)**.

Highlighted by Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk and Scheck (2000), leadership styles that encourage employees' commitment are essential for an organization to successfully achieving their goals. It has become clear that organizational commitment (OC) has important implications for employees and organizations through various studies by researchers. Organizations are now evolving toward structures in which leader means responsibility but not authority, and where the leader's job is not to command, but to persuade. Hence, in order to be effective, it is critical for leaders to influence their subordinates, peers, and superiors to assist and support their proposals, plans, and to motivate them to carry out with their decisions. It is important for the future principals or leaders to know what are the aspects that play an important role in leading or have big impact in boosting the commitment of the teachers.

Studies by Meyer et al. (2002, p.83) demonstrated that perceived organizational support has the strongest positive correlation with affective commitment; the results also indicated that correlations involving work experience variables were generally much stronger than those involving personal characteristics (p. 32). In another study, Coladarci (1992) found that the principal's conduct is a significant but modest predictor of teachers' commitment to teaching. It appears from previous research that a relationship could exist between the principals' leadership styles and the components of teachers' organizational commitment. Studies by Abdul, Cheah and Aziah (2008) indicate that there is significant correlation between democratic transformational practices satisfaction but not with teacher's commitment. Abdul et al further highlighted that qualitative studies are needed to provide deeper insight although transformative leadership empowering teachers in decision making tent do increase teacher's job satisfaction and commitment.

In educational institution, the central and most effective factor required to enhance teacher commitment is leadership (Bennis & Nanus, 2003, p. 8). Leaders are those most able and capable of creating and maintaining cultures where people feel wanted, where they are energized and creative, and where they love coming to work (Bennis & Townsend, 2005, p. 7). Technically, everything school principals do could be regarded in one way or another as bringing support for teaching and learning (Prestine & Nelson, 2005, p. 47). For this reason, educators and policymakers alike seek a frame for effective leadership that can produce sustainable school improvement and continuous teacher commitment (Lambert, 2002, p. 38). Thus, school principals should be aware of their critical and most influential status in the educational system.

Previous studies (e.g. Bateman and Strasser, 1984; DeCotiis and Summers, 1987; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990 cited in Peter Lok, 1999) have investigated the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment. The results of Peter Lok (1999) further confirmed earlier findings that the leadership style consideration variable had a stronger influence on commitment than the leadership style structure variable. Strong positive relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment is also reported in previous studies (for example, Bateman and Strasser, 1984; DeCotiis and Summers, 1987; Glisson and Durick, 1988; Iverson and Roy, 1994; Mowday et al., 1979; Vandenberg and Lance, 1992; Williams and Anderson, 1991; Williams and Hazer, 1986 cited in Peter Lok, 1999).

While many teachers leaving school and teaching because of factors remote from the school administrators' control, there are still many who cite poor and inefficient leadership and the absence of administrative support as reasons for leaving (Fiore, 2004, p. 135). Jung and Sosik (2002) demonstrated that transformational leadership is positively related to group empowerment, cohesiveness, and effectiveness. While, Bogler (2001) found that principals' leadership style affects teachers' satisfaction, both directly and indirectly, through their occupational perception. This supports the findings of Foels, Driskell, Mullen, and Salas (2000) that group members experiencing democratic leadership were more satisfied than group members experiencing autocratic leadership. However, group member satisfaction was moderated by variables such as gender, composition of the group, and its size. Another study by Yu, Leithwood, and Jantzi, (2002) has indicated that there is a weak but significant effect of transformational leadership on teachers' commitment to change and reform. This work reinforces the findings of a study by Geijsel, Sleegers, Leithwood, and Jantzi (2003) which demonstrated an effect of transformational leadership on teachers' commitment to school reform.

To explore organizational commitment differences between teachers' on the basis of years of experience, Mohamed (2008) found that no impact of teachers' experience on the levels of organizational commitment. This is not consistent with the findings of Reyes (1992) that suggested teachers' years of experience correlate negatively with their organizational commitment but it does reinforce Peter Lok and Crawford's (1999) finding that years of experience fail to show any relationship with commitment.

There are no significant differences in the levels of organizational commitment between male and female teachers (Mohamed, 2008). This study was seconded by Kacmar, Carlson and Brymer (1999) who found that gender is not good predictor of any of the forms of organizational commitment. In another research carried out by Reyes (1992) who found that female teachers tend to have higher school commitment than male teachers.

A number of studies have suggested that age (Hrebiniak and Alutto, 1972; Lawler, 1973; Simpson, 1985; Steers, 1977 cited in Peter Lok et al, 1999) and education (Brief and Aldag, 1980; DeCotiis and Summers, 1987; Mowday et al., 1982; Steers, 1977 cited in Peter Lok et al, 1999) have a significant impact on organizational commitment. Weisman et al. (1981) found that age was a strong predictor of job satisfaction among nurses. Mathieu and Zajac (1990) and Staw and Ross (1977) suggested that commitment increases with age and decreases with education. Peter Lok (1999) revealed a small (r = 0.23**) statistically significant positive correlation between age and commitment, but a near zero correlation between education and commitment. The older the participant, the greater was the degree of commitment, reflects the notion of ``sunk costs" (Staw and Ross, 1977, Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1984) which was perceived as an investment in the organization (Williams and Hazer, 1986). In relation to educational level and organizational commitment, it has been found that educational level was negatively correlated with organizational commitment (DeCotiis and Summers 1987; Mowday et al., 1982; Battersby et al., 1990 in Peter Lok, 1999). DeCotiis and Summers (1987) suggest that this negative correlation arises because it might be perceived that rewards do not adequately reflect the level of education, knowledge and skills. In contrast, Peter Lok et al., (1999) found that there is a positive relationship between age and commitment. Previous studies have indicated that position tenure (Brief and Aldag, 1980; Gregersen and Black, 1992; Mottaz, 1988b cited in Peter Lok, 1999) and organizational tenure (Mathieu and Hamel, 1989; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990 cited in Peter Lok., 1999) have positive effects on commitment. This can be explained as a result of the organization's socialization process. The length of service in an organization is positively related to the level of internalization of organizational values which results in greater commitment from the individual (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Hellriegel et al., 1995; O'Reilly et al., 1991).

Another important finding in Peter Lok (1999) research is that innovative and supportive subcultures had positive associations with commitment, while a bureaucratic subculture had a slight negative association with commitment. This finding is consistent with previous findings which suggested that a bureaucratic environment often resulted in a lower level of employee commitment and performance (Krausz et al., 1995; Trice and Beyer, 1993). A similar, but weaker pattern of associations with commitment was also observed with the corresponding organizational culture variables in previous study.

2.3 Today Challenges to Principal Leadership Style

Today principal cannot, and should not, be the only leaders in a school. The pervasive view of the principal as the sole instructional leader in school is inadequate and increasingly difficult given the current demands for academic accountability and accessibility (Marsh, 2000; Pellicer & Anderson, 1995; Smylie, Conley & Marks, 2002). The implication of teacher leadership for schools exists around a shared leadership model in an empowering learning community. However, the absence of a clear concept of teacher leadership limits collective action to effectively change schools and improves student learning.

However, there is little preparation for teachers and administrators to work together. Greenlee (2007) agreed with Carr (1997) asserted that frustration and dissatisfaction of many 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 seemed that many administrators lacked knowledge to be curriculum and instructional leaders thus defying schools to be of high performing ones.

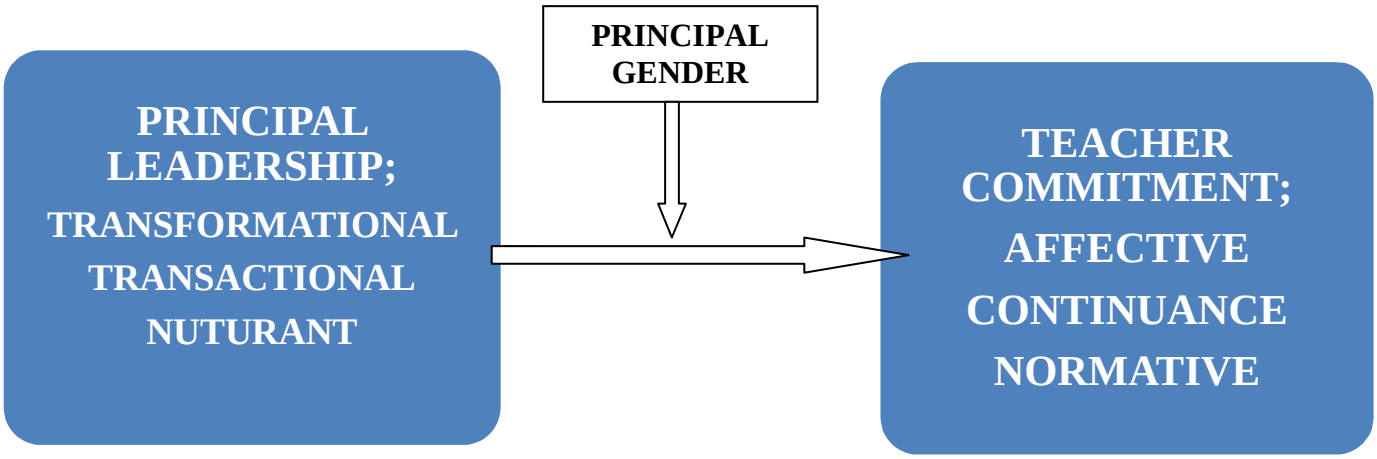
The Principal's role may be multifaceted from school to school or place to place, yet there is one role that all principals must face: dealing with "change." While undergoing change, many researchers have found that teachers have to be empowered so that they are willing to work for new change. Research suggests that leaders need to have qualities that facilitate followers to transform from one situation to another (Shamir et al., 1993; Yukl, 1999).

Inevitably, future principals and administrators must share the particular knowledge and skills that are manifest as educational leadership. Thus, they might be educated together without the barriers of traditional university programming with its emphasis on the continuing role of the principal as the solitary instructional leader. Consequently, rather than imagining more ways to lure teachers into administration, we might concentrate on how to redefine the roles and responsibilities of administrators and teachers and re-conceptualize school leadership as a whole.

3.0 PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPHOTHESES DEVELOPMENT.

In this study, the variable of the principal's role is assumed to be an independent variable, the principal is considered to be the agent of change, influencing directly the actions of teachers and the attainment of teachers' commitment as the final outcomes. Figure 1 shows this research conceptual framework.

Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework.



3.1 Suggested Hypothesis

For the purpose of this research, the researcher hypothesizes that specific leadership styles will have a strong relationship on the level of school teachers' commitment. It has been assumed that the leadership styles of principals will have some stage of psychological influences on the teachers' that he or she is leading. 3 major hypotheses had been concluded from literature review for further testing in this research.

H1: Male Principal's transformational leadership styles have a strong relationship with teachers' organizational commitment.

H2: Female Principal's transformational leadership styles have a strong relationship with teachers' organizational commitment.
H3: Male Principal's transactional leadership styles have a strong relationship with teachers' organizational commitment.
H4: Female Principal's transactional leadership styles have a strong relationship with teachers' organizational commitment.
H5: Male Principal's nurturant leadership styles have a strong relationship with teachers' organizational commitment.
H6: Female Principal's nurturant leadership styles have a strong relationship with teachers' organizational commitment.

4.0 CONCLUSION.

There is no one "right" way to lead or manage that suits all situations. To choose the most effective approach for us, we must consider:

- The skill levels and experience of the members of our team.
- The work involved (routine, new or creative).
- The organizational environment (stable or radically changing, conservative or adventurous).
- Our own preferred or natural style.

The above consideration has strengthened our belief that leadership theories are always dynamic in manifestation organizational commitment for most cultures. The main purpose of this research is to integrate both the western and eastern differentiation in Malaysian context and to proceed how authentically their theories apply in this emerging and growing country. It is a "the east meet west" research, where by other influential factors are considered to be significant in moderating the relationship between the styles of leadership and the level of teacher organizational commitment.

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