

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON TRANSACTIONAL AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLES AMONG DEPARTMENT HEADS AT TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to compare staff's perceptions of the cruciality between transactional and transformational leadership styles among department heads in Malaysia. The sample consisted of 52 administrative and teaching staff from four private colleges in Sabah and Sarawak. An online questionnaire was used to collect data that were subsequently transferred onto an Excel spreadsheet. Findings revealed that transactional leadership style had a higher mean score of 4.46. About 91 percent of staff indicated that department heads must make changes when necessary and clarify staff's expectations related to performance goals. Approximately 96 percent of staff indicated that department heads should not wait but must take action before problems became serious. On the other hand, transformational leadership style was found to have a mean score of 4.40. About 92 percent of staff indicated that department heads must express confidence on goal achievement, while 93 percent

revealed that department heads should suggest innovative ways to get work done. Lastly, 94 percent of staff indicated that department heads should emphasize the mission of the organization. Findings implied that Malaysian tertiary staff tend to prefer transactional leadership, while their department heads tend to be more directive and autocratic toward staff. Since organizational hierarchy is well respected, staff often follow orders, while department heads are expected to use their authority to manage subordinates.

Introduction

Leadership in tertiary education primarily deals with assisting staff and students to become better versions of themselves (Wann, 2022). With regards to staff, educational leadership ensure that every staff has the resources necessary to teach, conduct research and perform community services effectively. Overall, it ensures that all staff feel safe in performing their duties, while enjoying the autonomy to actively participate in activities that can enhance their professional development. With regards to students, educational leadership involves guiding them in their knowledge acquisition, while scaffolding them to attain intellectual goals. It offers them opportunities for active learning through direct instruction as well as meaningful experiences to develop specific skills and generic attributes.

According to Wann (2022), academics today encounter multifaceted challenges that make it difficult for them to focus on their job specifications. Effective leadership motivates them to improve their knowledge and skills to achieve their key performance indicators, while solving academic problems that range from classroom management to collaborating with different personalities. Moreover, it encourages them to address academic and behavioural issues with other staff and develop solutions as a team working toward common goals. In brief, effective leadership enables staff to adapt to the needs of students by equipping them with the necessary resources that allow them to persist under difficult circumstances.

Recent research showed that effective leaders tend to have a significant influence on organizational behaviour, goal attainment and quality assurance (QA). Dubey, Pathak and Sahu (2023) found that effective leadership tended to have a significant impact on organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and job satisfaction, besides having a significant moderating and mediating influence on the relationship between the two variables. On the other hand, Asamoah (2023) found that effective leaders tended to uphold ethical principles that can influence departmental goal attainment. Since leadership ethics is crucial to goal attainment, educational leaders, including deans, department heads, faculty and other stakeholders should incorporate leadership ethics in designing the best practices for sustainability and progress. Lastly, Ahmad and Ahmed (2023) found that leaders' attributes, understanding of, and attitudes toward, quality assurance (QA) tended to influence the QA implementation at universities. Additionally, leaders' personal attributes also tended to shape leadership style either as transformational or compliance; while transformational leaders implement QA procedures with the aim of improving the teaching and learning process and research quality, compliance leaders are primarily concerned with the implementation of QA procedures to satisfy the requirements of an external regulatory body.

Review of Literature

Not all tertiary education leaders are exactly similar, while there is no single style that is best for educational leadership (McDonald, 2021). There are differing styles that are suitable for dealing with different situations or with diverse groups of people. While there are numerous positions in tertiary education that require effective leadership, the styles can be highly dissimilar depending on the individual or the setting. Whatever the leadership style of a tertiary leader, the ultimate goal is to help staff and students achieve to their fullest potential. Nevertheless, leadership in tertiary education often differs from that in entrepreneurship and corporations as it is much more about people and the environment rather than profitability first. To provide a theoretical framework for the study, this literature review focuses on effective leadership that incorporates various elements from different leadership styles.

According to Bertschinger (2006), effective department heads recruit to build a strong, diverse organization and continue their recruitment success by fostering a positive work environment and proper executing. First, they join search and admissions committees, including an unconscious bias workshop or a diversity forum, while familiarizing themselves with diversity terminology and issues. Additionally, they execute by advancing diversity and inclusion within the department by sharing expectations with staff and undertaking at least one departmental initiative to increase underrepresented groups in the profession. Second, effective department heads create listening opportunities, including meetings, lunches and hallway walks that allow them to interact with faculty members individually to decipher what they need. Lastly, they execute by responding to requests the best they can and with transparency. They emphasize accountability by meeting with faculty to support their work as well as to credit their work as departmental service. Overall, they foster a respectful work environment by helping staff thrive by joining relevant seminars workshops, including conflict management, crucial conversations and initiatives to increase faculty diversity.

Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) maintained that effective department heads tend to have characteristics associated with a sense of calling, empathy and healing. First, their sense of calling equips them with a conscious choice to serve others. Their altruism tends to greatly impact the organization and its members. Moreover, their selfless and sacrificial roles they play in organizations often gain respect and loyalty from followers. Their sense of calling falls within a spiritual leadership framework that makes a difference and brings meaning into their life. Their major intention as leaders is to embrace a selfless objective, showing a willingness to serve and to sacrifice self-interest for the common benefit. Second, effective department heads exhibit empathy and are therefore able to put themselves in the circumstances of others. Empathy is a key component of emotional intelligence that equips department heads

with the cognitive processes and skills to understand the emotions and needs of others. It provides them the compassion within the context of altruism, which is actually the ability to appreciate the circumstances that others encounter. Lastly, effective department heads emanate a sense of healing. They are able to assist with emotional resolution or healing to help resolve broken spirits and emotional pain that is caused by failed hopes, dreams or relationships. Effective department heads posit that the primary purpose of leadership is to influence feelings and emotions to humanize the organization.

Knapper and Piccinni, as cited in Kelly (2009), asserted that effective department heads often identify a need for change, involve the entire department, reward good teaching and promote evidence-teaching. First, being aware that excellent teaching involves change precipitated by stakeholders' dissatisfaction, socioeconomic issues, institutional pressure or accreditation requirements, they provide active support for the improvement of the teaching and learning process by taking the lead. They strive to derive support from committed, like-minded and energetic individuals who are change capable. Second, they get the entire department involved to bring change in the curriculum by procuring staff support and engagement. Third, they reward good teaching by allocating greater weightage for teaching and rewarding it in various ways, including salary increment and praise for positive teaching appraisal. They also incorporate a certain level of teaching, junior and senior qualifications, research output and community service as part of the promotion process. Lastly, they practise evidence-based teaching by adopting a professional approach to pedagogy, while making an effort to promote teaching effectiveness.

Kruse, Hackmann and Lindle (2020) implied that effective department heads have the capacity to address departmental budget challenges and hiring issues brought on by the pandemic. They excel in developing fiscally sound and equitable budgets to support their programs, while ensuring that staff workloads are equitably balanced in the midst of managing finances. To deal with immediate and unexpected losses caused by the pandemic, they strive to overcome financial uncertainties related to tuition fees, student housing and other allocations. Although not directly involved in campus-level financial issues, they still have to interpret communications with immediate staff and students; for instance, they have to succinctly deliver information regarding campus-level responses to the economic downturn and university fiscal processes.

Holt and Marques (2012) conceptualized that effective leaders have empathy which is an essential aspect of 21st century leadership that can help prevent ethical disasters in organizations. Since empathy can be instilled formally and informally in various environments, tertiary institutions need to strive to help develop appropriate skills and traits among upcoming leaders who intend to adopt leadership strategies that are relevant in the ever-changing academe. Moreover, leaders in the 21st century still need to develop good character to be competent and ethical. To manage today's constantly evolving institutions, leaders have to collaborate in decision making and conflict resolution, besides demonstrating the adaptability to lead their organizations based on real-life experiences. In brief, tertiary institutions have to focus more on empathy and other generic skills, while making a concerted effort in infusing greater awareness on the urgency of empathy among leaders who are expected to demonstrate moral-ethical capacity to maintain equilibrium in academia.

Mohamed et al. (2018) summarized the ethical attributes that enable effective leaders to treat others with respect and authenticity. First, as role models, they lead by example ensuring they themselves are able to demonstrate ethical values, ethical self-behaviour and ethical execution of their tasks. They strive to show good example by practising integrity, which is the tool to earn trust from staff and other stakeholders. Second, by demonstrating effective communication, concern and approachability, they are able to provide firm and succinct messages, statements and clear instructions as well as interact effectively with others. Their approachability enables them to willingly to listen to staff and learn from them. Third, being well disciplined, they are able to

manage their behaviour and actions through self-motivation, rules and regulations, while upholding procedures concerning hiring or dismissal, task execution and deadlines. Lastly, their a sense of spirituality encourages them to be holistic and interconnected, while maintaining such values as honesty, responsibility and innovativeness.

Guzmán et al. (2020) postulated that effective leaders are able to cope with the challenges posed by Industry 4.0 characterized by digital transformation in the creation of products and services. In the educational context, Industry 4.0 requires leaders to produce graduates who can use cyber-physical systems to promote innovative ways of production, value creation and real-time optimization. Additionally, they may also possess the skills related to cognition, active listening, critical thinking and interpersonal communication to promote and sustain Industry 4.0 ventures. With high cognitive ability, they are able to effectively communicate and disseminate information in a digitally agile environment to promote learning and innovation, construct a digital environment and stimulate higher participation among staff. As active listeners, they encourage the construction of a feedback culture and openness for suggestions, while as critical thinkers, they are able to adequately evaluate the digital environment to implement new technologies. Lastly, with effective interpersonal communication skills, they are able to create a more collaborative and participative environment that motivates staff to experiment with novel ideas.

Campos et al. (2020) espoused that effective leaders promote team heterogeneity to have a more competitive edge. Believing that heterogeneity can yield more innovative ideas and allow each staff to display the best performance, they try to identify possible challenges and promote decision making through a common purpose. Further, they also use heterogeneity as the parent of big teams; by combining the talents of the team, they obtain a more synergistic outcome than the sum of its talents. In brief, effective leaders associate heterogeneity with organizational success in terms of profitability as well as the decision-making processes that enrich the teams. By promoting heterogeneity, they are able to create well-balanced teams that enhance organizational efficiency by addressing various challenges grounded on different perspectives.

According to Page (2021), effective leaders share their vision, guide by example, demonstrate integrity and communicate effectively. First, their vision provides a clear idea of what their goals are and how to attain them. By articulating their vision clearly and passionately, they ensure that staff understand how they can contribute to attain higher level goals. By working toward their vision with persistence, tenacity and enthusiasm, they inspire others to follow suit. Second, effective leaders guide by example by building credibility and gaining the respect of others, besides demonstrating the behaviour that they want staff to exhibit. Demanding a lot from staff and setting high standards for themselves, they align words and actions to build trust and make staff more inclined to follow their example. Third, by demonstrating integrity by drawing on their values to guide decisions, behaviour and dealings with others, they embrace clear convictions about what is acceptable or not; they are respected for being genuine, principled, ethical and consistent. Demonstrating a strong sense of character and keeping their promises, they communicate openly, honestly and directly with others. Displaying integrity through their daily actions, they are often rewarded with loyalty, confidence and respect from staff. Lastly, besides communicating clearly, concisely and tactfully, they not only listen attentively to others and respond appropriately, but also share valuable information, ask intelligent questions, solicit input and new ideas, clarify misunderstandings and specify what they want.

Goolamally and Ahmad (2014) found that effective leaders have five important attributes to boost school excellence and to create sustainable leadership; they have honesty, foresight, inspiration, spiritual competence and self-efficacy. First, being honest, trustworthy and sincere in their words and actions, they are transparent and show congruence between their feelings, thoughts, words

and actions. Moreover, honesty also equips them with self-respect and loyalty toward themselves and others, thus allowing them to focus on who they really are, what they know and what they do to provide the right guidance for staff. Second, their foresight enables them to promote organizational growth by instilling work spirit, motivation and a shared vision amongst staff. They are able to build aspirations through consensus, communication and persuasion, thus encouraging staff to work together as a team. They also dare to take calculated risks, change the status quo, make paradigm shifts and view challenges as opportunities.

In addition, effective leaders provide inspiration to staff by motivating staff to advance beyond what is expected. To motivate them to strive for the success of the organization, they need to get to know their staff well. By using meaningful language and positive communication, they encourage staff to work with trust and confidence. Their spiritual competence also makes them highly dedicated, focused and proactive. Moreover, being able to exert emotional control in different situations, they are able to suppress negative emotions for effective problem-solving, while demonstrating a sense of care and understanding. Lastly, their self-efficacy enables them to evaluate and appreciate the efforts and resilience of staff, besides taking action to reach stipulated goals (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2014).

Cabuenas, Singco and Español (2021) who examined leadership traits, styles and skills among university leaders found that that department heads tended to exhibit extroverted characteristics. Perceived as friendly and approachable figures who are task-focused, self-confident and trustworthy, they are people-oriented who strive to make staff feel comfortable with themselves. Being able to influence staff to get along with one another, they often establish active communication with staff and respond favourably to suggestions related to problem-solving. They tend to be collectivist and communal, placing a premier on interpersonal relationships. Additionally, three leadership themes emerged from Cabuenas, Singco and Español's (2021) findings. First, as good role models, the leaders in their study welcome organizational change with actions rather than words. Striving to be morally upright, they empower and inspire staff to achieve things beyond expectation. Second, being inspiring, they motivate staff by emphasizing that organizational success depends largely on collegiality and teamwork. Besides empowering a diverse team of talented, motivated staff to achieve goals, they also instil a sense of community and collaboration. Third, they maintain harmonious relationships and associations with staff that foster a working environment conducive for teaching, learning and research.

Carlow University (2023) emphasizes that leadership effectiveness is a combination of professional expertise and management skills in all stages of administration, from planning to implementation to systemization. Effective tertiary leaders are responsible for creating the structures that enhance staff performance and student learning, while setting expectations for the institution's practices and outcomes, guided by reflection, authenticity and passion. Being reflective, they are honest about their own progress and those they lead, while being authentic, they exhibit a strong sense of self and shows their genuine self to others. They are able to open the way for people to confidently work according to their true values, interests and strengths. Being passionate, they deeply care about their work and community. Additionally, effective tertiary leaders execute several responsibilities with broad practices. First, they establish clear goals and ensure that staff understand their roles in fulfilling them. Second, they lead by example by modelling the behaviour they want to see in others. Third, they provide constructive feedback to help colleagues, staff members and students grow. Fourth, they delegate to maximize their resources and ensure that they have sufficient time for priorities. Fifth, they pay attention to staff's goals and determine how they are personally motivated. Sixth, they practise active listening to create a culture that values that seriously considers the concerns of staff, students and other stakeholders. Lastly, they support the community, for example, by helping students and their families obtain the necessary school supplies, being spokespersons for the institution or meeting with the board of directors to create new policies.

Pihie, Sadeghi and Elias (2011) found that effective department heads often demonstrate both transformational and transactional leadership behaviours. Transformational leaders are confident and powerful; they focus on higher order ideals and ethics. Since they emphasize values, beliefs and a sense of mission, they often use inspirational motivation by posing challenges and meaning for staff. Setting ambitious goals, they enthuse about achieving future goals and inspire staff to achieve optimal performance. Besides instilling crucial organizational values, they also stress worthwhile visions and ethical aspects of their activities to enhance team spirit. On the other hand, transactional leaders are contingent reinforcers who set expectations and only give recognition when goals are being accomplished. Further, they provide essential resources, fulfil material and mental needs of staff and present rewards based on contractual obligations. Besides offering rewards to staff in response to desirable performance, they are able to increase job satisfaction by focusing on their concerns or needs, satisfying their requirements and necessities, inspiring them to go beyond expectations and encouraging them to engage in innovative problem-solving.

Gap, Significance of the Study and Research Questions

A review of literature showed that research on leadership styles among top administrators at private tertiary institutions in Sabah and Sarawak is lacking. The purpose of this study was to compare staff's perceptions of the cruciality between transactional and transformational leadership styles among department heads at private tertiary institutions in the two Bornean states. This study was significant for three reasons. First, it was the first to examine leadership styles and attributes of department heads at private higher institutions of learning in Sabah and Sarawak where education leadership research is seriously lacking. Second, findings would provide greater insight into the leadership styles and attributes of educational leaders within the Malaysian context, which is beneficial in terms of personal and professional development and enhancement. Lastly, more research of this kind should be conducted to generate new knowledge for policymakers to implement development and training programs for academic professionals who aspire to secure management and leadership positions in tertiary education.

With the gap, purpose and significance of the study in mind, three research questions were formulated to guide the research:

- What were the descriptive statistics of transactional leadership styles among department heads?
- What were the descriptive statistics of transformational leadership styles among department heads?
- Which leadership style was more preferred by tertiary staff?

Methodology

Instrument

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was used to assess transactional and transformational leadership styles (Bass & Avolio, 1995). Bass and Avolio (1995) found that the reliability of the MLQ ranged from 0.74 to 0.91 for each leadership factor. Its scores are measures of characteristics or behaviours of leaders including individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, idealized influence (attributed) and idealized influence (behaviour) associated with transformational leadership and contingent reward and management by exception (active) associated with transactional leadership. Additionally, Rowold (2005) assessed convergent validity of MLQ with the Transformational Leadership Inventory (TLI) by administering both to 267 subordinates who evaluated their respective superiors' leadership styles. Findings showed that transformational scales of the MLQ had high and significant convergent validity to the TLI transformational leadership scales. Interrater agreement and test-retest reliability were calculated; internal consistencies of the MLQ scales as indicated by Cronbach's alpha were good, while interclass

correlations for each of the nine leadership scales ranged from satisfactory or high. Lastly, its test-retest reliability was generally high and significant.

Sample, data collection and analysis

The study was limited to 52 administrative and teaching staff from four private colleges in Sabah and Sarawak. Deans, coordinators and registrars of nine colleges were contacted via email, but only four colleges agreed to participate in the study. According to the central limit theorem, the sample size was adequate to provide reliable and valid data. Demographic information of the sample is found in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic information of the sample

Profile	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	25	48.1%
	Female	27	51.9%
Age	25-35 years old	13	25%
	36-45 years old	15	28.8%
	46-55 years old	16	30.8%
	56-60 years old	8	15.4%
Job Experience (years)	1-5	6	11.5%
	6-10	7	13.5%
	11-15	10	19.2%
	16-20	12	23.1%
	More than 20	17	32.7%

Data were collected by asking the staff to complete the questionnaire online. Ethical issues related to data collection were considered whereby information provided by respondents would be kept confidential to reduce the likelihood of any psychological harm. Further, respondents were required to provide informed consent prior to completing the questionnaires and were aware that they had the right to withdraw their participation at any time during the survey. A spreadsheet was automatically generated and Excel was used to analyze data. Lastly, descriptive statistics were used to present the findings.

Findings

Transactional leadership

Results showed that transactional leadership style had a mean score of 4.46. Percentages of agreement (crucial/very crucial) of each item were collapsed to obtain an overall impression of transactional leadership styles. Items with the highest percentages were identified. With regards to transactional style, 91 percent of staff indicated that department heads must make changes when necessary and clarify staff’s expectations related to performance goals. About 96 percent of staff indicated that department heads should not wait, but must take action before problems became serious (see Table 2).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics (percentage) of transactional leadership style

Item	1	2	3	4	5
Provides assistance in exchange for staff’s efforts	0	3.8	13.2	39.6	43.4
Does not wait for things go to wrong before taking action	1.9	0	11.3	35.8	50.9
Makes changes when necessary	0	1.9	7.5	32.1	58.5
Takes action before problems become serious	0	1.9	1.9	30.2	66
Clarifies staff’s expectations related to performance goals	0	0	9.4	32.1	32.1
Expresses satisfaction when staff fulfil performance goals	0	0	9.4	35.8	54.7
Gives full attention in dealing with mistakes, complaints or failure	0	1.9	9.4	28.3	60.4
Does not wait until problems get serious	0	0	3.8	26.4	69.8
Mean	4.46				

Not crucial at all = 1, Not crucial = 2, Neutral = 3, Crucial = 4, Very Crucial = 5

Transformational leadership

Results showed that transformational leadership style had a mean score of 4.40. Percentages of agreement (crucial/very crucial) of each item were collapsed to obtain an overall impression of transformational leadership style. Items with the highest percentages were identified. About 92 percent of staff indicated that department heads must express confidence on goal achievement, while 93 percent revealed that department heads should suggest innovative ways to get work done. Lastly, 94 percent of staff indicated that department heads should emphasize the mission of the organization (see Table 3).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics (percentage) of transformational leadership style

Item	1	2	3	4	5
Instils pride in staff for being associated with the organization	0	0	13.2	34	52.8
Articulates a compelling vision	0	0	13.2	35.8	50.9
Expresses confidence on goal achievement	0	0	7.5	37.7	54.7
Seeks different perspectives in problem solving	1.9	0	9.4	28.3	60.4
Suggests innovative ways to complete work	0	0	7.5	30.2	62.3
Allocates time on staff training	0	7.5	32.1	58.5	1.9
Treats staff as individuals rather than members of a group	1.9	5.7	26.4	24.5	41.5
Considers staff as having different needs, abilities or aspirations	0	0	9.4	34	56.6
Goes beyond self-interest for the good of staff	0	1.9	15.1	41.5	41.5
Helps staff to develop their strengths	0	0	9.4	35.8	54.7
Displays a sense of power and confidence in staff	0	1.9	9.4	43.4	45.3
Possesses a strong sense of purpose	0	0	9.4	28.3	62.3
Emphasizes importance of group’s mission	0	0	5.7	28.3	66
Talks optimistically about the future	0	0	9.4	34	56.6
Mean	4.40				

Not

crucial at all = 1, Not crucial = 2, Neutral = 3, Crucial = 4, Very Crucial = 5

Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

Although this study was constrained by a small sample ($n = 52$), and generalizability of findings could be improved by using a bigger sample recruited from both private and public institutions of higher learning, it still yielded useful findings. Current findings showed that transactional leadership style had a higher mean score of 4.46, followed by transformational leadership style with a mean of 4.40, implying that tertiary staff in Sabah and Sarawak prefer department heads who practise transactional leadership style. Transactional leadership is traditional leadership based on a customary system of operation and coordination (Burns, 1978; McCleskey, 2014). It is often part of an existing system of control, allowing the leader to use authority based on status or personal loyalty created through education. Many real-world examples, available practices and on-the-job training opportunities indicate that most leaders often try to demonstrate their transactional leadership behaviours. Overall, transactional leadership remains popular among Malaysian leaders; along the spectrum of leadership versus management, it is clearly closer to the management end (MacKenzie, Podsakoff & Rich, 2001). This finding was supported by previous research. Lo, Ramayah and Hii (2009) who examined Malaysian executives' leadership styles found that several dimensions of transactional leadership tended to have a positive and significant relationship with organizational commitment. Bodla and Nawaz (2010) also found that a majority of the teaching staff at Malaysian universities tended to prefer transactional leadership style.

Shamsuri and Mazzarol (2010) who investigated the impact of leadership on organizational innovation performance among small and medium enterprises found that transactional leaders tended to place emphasis on process innovation. Additionally, Jogulu (2010) who investigated the impact of cultural values on leadership styles found significant differences between leadership styles and cultural groups; transactional leadership was found to be strongly aligned with Malaysian managers' ratings, indicating that culture and leadership interact in different ways in diverse contexts. Further, Marmaya et al. (2011) who examined staff's perceptions of prevalent leadership styles among Malaysian managers found that transactional leadership was positively related with organizational commitment.

Afshari and Gibson (2016) explored the relationship between transactional leadership organizational commitment, taking into account the mediation effect of psychological need satisfaction. Findings revealed that transactional leadership was significantly related to organizational commitment, while the relationship was mediated by competence and relatedness. Further, Hussain, Wan Ismail and Javed (2017) found that Malaysian leaders tended to get high ratings on transactional leadership, which also could be culturally contingent. Nevertheless, leaders in collectivist cultures such as Malaysia tend to be more transactional because of the nation's high level of collectivism and high-power distance. Lastly, Khan (2017) postulated that transactional leadership theory is widely used in educational institutions, as reflected in the relationship between instructors and students, which subsequently becomes an easy extension to the performance requirements between staff and department leaders. Hoxha (2019) who conducted a review of literature on transactional leadership in Malaysia, summarized that it tended to positively influence organizational performance, trust and distributive justice among staff and staff commitment. In general, Malaysian leaders tended to be more directive and autocratic in their relationship with staff; however, this leadership style was reported to be effective. In the Malaysian context, organizational hierarchy is well respected and staff are expected to follow orders of superiors, while leaders are expected to use their authority over their subordinates.

Since findings of this study indicated that college staff in Malaysia prefer their department heads to practise transactional leadership, department heads should seek to motivate staff by appealing to their self-interests in both tangible and non-tangible ways. Additionally, they can motivate staff to achieve expected levels of performance by helping them to recognize task responsibilities,

identify goals and develop confidence about meeting desired performance levels. Further, they should employ contingent reinforcement to reflect effective transactional leadership, for instance, by offering staff both material and psychological rewards contingent on the fulfilment of contractual obligations. Lastly, besides offering contingent rewards, they can strive to inspire a reasonable degree of involvement, loyalty, commitment and performance from staff.

Nyangaya (2023) reiterated that leaders must adapt and embrace new approaches to navigate through uncertainty and drive success. First, to take on the mantle of leadership in a transformed world of tertiary education, transactional leaders, besides adhering to their traditional roles, should also embrace agility and flexibility by reducing rigid hierarchies and top-down decision-making. Instead, they must be willing to pivot, adapt and respond swiftly to unforeseen circumstances by fostering a culture of experimentation and open communication to overcome obstacles and seize new opportunities. Second, they should foster an inclusive and diverse environment where diverse perspectives are valued to promote innovation, creativity and job engagement. Third, they should prioritize empathy and emotional intelligence in a world dominated by remote work and digital interactions. By connecting with others on a more humane level, they will become more aware of staff needs, thereby increasing their loyalty and helping them unleash their full potential. Fourth, they need to cultivate a lifelong learning culture by investing in their own development and that of their staff, promoting continuous growth, innovation and adaptability and embracing new technologies for skill-building and collaboration to remain competitive in a dynamic tertiary landscape. Lastly, they can lead with purpose by articulating a compelling vision and purpose that aligns with the values of the organization and its stakeholders. By weaving purpose into the fabric of their leadership, leaders can create a sense of meaning, instil passion and ignite a collective drive to achieve extraordinary outcomes.

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