

## Staff's perceptions of transformational leadership behaviours among departmental heads at Malaysian tertiary institutions

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to examine staff's perceptions of the cruciality of transformational leadership behaviours among department heads at private tertiary institutions. The study was limited to 56 administrative and teaching staff from three private colleges in Sabah and Sarawak as well as an Australian-based university in Sarawak. The Transformational Scale/Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) designed by Bass and Avolio (1995) was administered online to collect data that were subsequently analysed using SPSS 26.0. Mann-Whitney U test revealed non-significant differences existed in terms of gender, while Kruskal-Wallis H test, revealed non-significant differences existed in terms of age and qualifications. A one-sample Wilcoxon test revealed that all transformational leadership items were significant at the hypothesised valued of 3.5, in which all items had median values that were significantly greatly than 3.5, indicating that staff tended to choose the higher score for all items. Additionally, the mean score of transformational leadership behaviours was 62 for males and 60 for females(out of a total of 70), indicating that staff tended to perceive the cruciality of transformational leadership among department heads, as average. Overall, about 82 to 97 percent of staff perceived that department heads should exhibit all of the transformational leadership behaviours, except for treating staff as individuals rather than members of a group.*

**Keywords:** 1.Cruciality of transformational leadership, 2.department heads, 3.private tertiary institutions

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### Introduction

Transformational leadership is evidenced when leaders strive to instil higher organisational morale and intrinsic motivation amongst staff (Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders, with their clear vision and influential personality, often inspire staff to modify their expectations, perceptions and attitudes to fulfil common goals. They are not only energetic, enthusiastic and passionate, but are also actively involved in the process, thus helping every group member to succeed. Besides inspiring growth, promoting loyalty and instilling confidence amongst staff, they are also able to garner trust, respect and admiration from others (Burns, 1978; Cherry, 2022). Bass (1998) elaborated on Burns' original idea and postulated that transformational leadership can be adequately assessed through its impact on staff (Bass, 1985; Bass,1998; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Cherry, 2022).

It is advantageous for Malaysian tertiary institutions to employ transformational leaders. First, these leaders' intellectual stimulation not only allows them to challenge the status quo, but also encourages them to promote creativity among staff by encouraging them to explore novel ways of solving problems and discovering new things. Second, their unique individualised consideration allows them to cultivate supportive relationships through open communication and freedom of idea sharing, which in turn, lead to immediate recognition of each staff's particular contributions. Third, their inspirational motivation with a clearly articulated vision allows staff to experience the same passion and motivation to fulfil institutional goals. Lastly, their idealised influence makes them good role models, besides enabling them to gain trust and respect from staff who will willingly emulate them and internalise their ideals (Bass, 1985; Bass, 1998; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Cherry, 2022).

Bass' (1998) transformational leadership theory is well suited in the context of Malaysian tertiary education which emphasises vision clarity, commitment, innovation and sustainability. By inspiring staff to incline toward the same vision, transformational leaders are able to promote high academic achievements and to affect change management in higher education. Besides keeping individual needs as a priority, they also focus on teamwork, diversity, intrinsic motivation and constructive feedback, which are fundamental requisites of tertiary education in Malaysia. In brief, transformational leadership, tied with profitability, social responsibility and environmental sustainability (triple bottom line), is highly recommended for Malaysia's evolving higher education in the face of global uncertainty, stiff competition and technological advancements.

### **Review of Literature**

The following literature review focused on the transformational leadership of educational leaders over the past 10 years. Ling (2012) examined the influence of transformational leadership on the commitment of 1,014 teachers in relation to organisation, teaching profession and student learning. Findings revealed that transformational leadership and teacher commitment had a significant linear relationship. Inspirational motivation, individualised consideration and intellectual stimulation were found to be significant predictors of teacher commitment toward their profession. Nevertheless, individualised consideration tended to be a significant factor in describing transformational leadership in collectivistic culture where teamwork was valued.

Keung and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2013) examined the relationship between cultural intelligence and transformational leadership among 193 international school leaders. Findings revealed that cultural intelligence tended to be significantly related to transformational leadership. Moreover, behavioural cultural intelligence and cognitive cultural intelligence were found to be significant predictors of transformational leadership. Leaders characterised by higher cultural intelligence tended to practise transformational leadership more frequently, demonstrating greater ability to manage multicultural environments.

Arokiasamy, Abdullah and Ismail (2014) examined the relationship between computers usage and leadership style among 520 secondary school principals. Their findings indicated that school principals used computers for instructional and administrative purposes, demonstrating average competency in computer applications. Further, cultural perceptions and transformational leadership contributed significantly to the level of computer usage. Findings implied that computer training and leadership development programs should incorporate the components of transformational leadership, including idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration to improve school principals' developmental needs and preparedness for innovative change.

Quin, Deris, Bischoff and Johnson (2015) examined principals' transformational leadership practices at high and low performing schools by surveying 92 teachers. Findings revealed significant group differences in five aspects, including modelling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process,

enabling others to act and encouraging the heart. High performing school principals tended to practise all five transformational leadership practices more regularly and effectively than those at low performing schools. Moreover, inspiring a shared vision and challenging the process tended to significantly impact student performance, implying that principal training courses should incorporate transformational leadership into their curricula.

Arokiasamy et al. (2016) examined the relationship between primary school principals' transformational leadership and organisational health among 275 teachers. Findings showed that primary school principals tended to practise transformational leadership at a moderate level. Transformational leadership was also found to significantly influence teachers' job satisfaction. Day, Gu and Sammons (2016) examined how school leaders combined transformational and instructional leadership to improve students' outcomes at 20 schools by investigating staff's perceptions of school-student improvement strategies. Findings revealed that successful principals tended to achieve and sustain academic improvement by combining both transformational and instructional leadership strategies. They demonstrated understanding of their school's needs and shared educational values by incorporating time- and context-sensitive strategies into the school's routine, culture and administration.

Ismail and Mydin (2018) examined the impact of transformational leadership and commitment on the innovative behaviour of 961 secondary school teachers. Findings showed that the mean value of teachers' innovative behaviour was moderate, with idea generation showing the highest level, followed by idea promotion and idea realisation. Findings also showed that commitment was a significant mediator on the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative behaviour, implying that greater transformational leaders' commitment could lead to improvement in teachers' innovative behaviour.

Yamamoto and Yamaguchi (2019) examined the relationships between Information and Communications Technology (ICT) implementation and transformational leadership among 222 principals and training managers. Four components of transformational leadership were considered, including charisma/idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. Findings showed that inspiring motivation had the strongest correlation with ICT implementation. School leaders' discussions with teachers concerning ICT use was strongly correlated to digital content use in teaching, indicating that transformational leaders were skilful in motivating teachers to use ICT in the classroom. Additionally, teachers' collaborations that stimulated innovation was significantly correlated with both ICT use in teaching and funding for ICT training.

Hermans (2021) examined discernment as a predictor for transformational leadership among 198 school leaders, defining the construct as an individual and communal practice of future decision-making based on personal qualities and teleological ethics of leaders. Findings showed that discernment was the strongest predictor of transformational leadership. School leaders of higher education demonstrated a higher level of transformative leadership compared to those in secondary education, and second, school leaders with a smaller school size also indicated a higher level of transformational leadership. Lastly, school leaders at private schools showed more transformational leadership than those in government-aided schools.

Menon (2021) examined the transformational leadership of school leaders in times of crisis by interviewing 30 primary school teachers. Findings showed that transformational school leaders, despite mounting school problems, tended to (a) foster greater interaction among school, home and stakeholders, (b) integrate moral values into their decisions and actions, (c) formulate shared and collegial activities, (d) emphasise teacher training and other initiatives to enhance intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction (e) solicit different perspectives from staff and (f) treat staff as unique individuals.

Zainal and Mohd Matore (2021) examined the influence of self-efficacy and school administrators' transformational leadership practices on 1,415 teachers' innovative behaviour. Findings indicated that teachers' self-efficacy and school administrators' transformational leadership practices tended to significantly impact on teachers' innovative behaviour, contributing 47 percent of its variance. Findings implied that policies and programs geared to improving teachers' innovative behaviour should also take self-efficacy and transformational leadership practices into account.

Ismail, Ahmad and Aman (2021) examined the impact of transformational leadership of principals on 477 secondary school teachers' innovative work behaviour. Findings showed that male principals tended to practise transformational leadership more often than their female counterparts, especially in terms of inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and idealized influence; however, female principals were more influential on the teachers' innovative work behaviour compared to their male counterparts.

Velarde, Ghani, Adams and Cheah (2022) examined the mediating effect of transformational leadership attributes on the cultural intelligence of 476 school leaders and organisational health of secondary schools. Findings showed that cultural intelligence had direct influence on transformational leadership and organisational health, while transformational leadership had a direct impact on organisational health. Further, transformational leadership had a mediating effect on both cultural intelligence and organisational health. Findings implied the importance of emphasising cultural diversity in educational leadership programs as well as multicultural provisions in organisational development.

Lastly, Bakker et al. (2022) examined the impact of transformational leadership on the performance of 57 naval cadets from a military university college. Findings revealed that transformational leadership had a significant indirect effect on work engagement in relation to strengths use and personal initiative, while personal initiative was positively related to next-day work engagement among cadets with high strengths use. Findings implied that transformational leaders can inspire staff to capitalise on their strengths use and proactive behaviours, which in turn, enhance their work engagement and job performance.

### **Statement of the problem, gap and significance of the study**

A review of literature showed that research on department heads' transformational leadership is lacking in Malaysia. The purpose of this study was to examine staff's perceptions of the cruciality of transformational leadership behaviours among department heads at private higher institutions of learning in Sabah and Sarawak, two Bornean states of Malaysia. The primary research objective was to fill the gap in terms of educational management and leadership in Malaysia's private tertiary education. Findings of this study would generate deeper insight into the significance of transformational leadership among providers of private higher education in the two Bornean states of Malaysia.

Aldhaheeri (2021) who examined the perceptions of 167 staff of their school leaders' leadership styles in Emirate of Abu Dhabi found that majority of school leaders tended to practise transformational leadership, leading to improved subordinate and organisational performance. This study hypothesised that staff at private tertiary institutions in Malaysia would score high in their perceptions of transformational leadership. Since most transformational leadership research has been undertaken in the corporate sector, it would be timely to discover how this would manifest in Malaysian tertiary institutions. Analysing transformational leadership among educational leaders would generate deeper understanding of its principal components, especially those that align with the goals of Malaysian higher education.

Additionally, since existing leadership theories are mostly established and fine-tuned in Western countries, their applicability in the Malaysian context deserves to be investigated. New research utilising a quantitative method would tailor such theories to Malaysian local institutions of higher learning, thus contributing to the repertoire of educational management and leadership in Malaysia. This study is significant because it is one of the first to examine the cruciality of transformational leadership at private tertiary institutions in Sabah and Sarawak where this kind of research is much needed to bring change and progress in tertiary education in this part of Malaysia.

Since no study has been undertaken to examine staff's perceptions of department heads' transformational leadership in the Bornean states, this study would be viable and relevant to generate new knowledge on

this construct within the Malaysian context. Findings of this study would support potential implications for department heads to review their leadership practices at private tertiary institutions. Findings would provide greater insight into the leadership styles and attributes of department heads within the Malaysian context, which is beneficial in terms of personal and professional development and enhancement. Further, more research of this kind can generate new guidelines for policymakers to implement development and training programs for academic professionals who aspire to secure management and leadership positions in higher education.

Finally, this study seeks to contribute in advancing the educational management and leadership literature with a greater insight into the multidimensionality of transformational leadership in relation to staff's perceptions. This, in turn, would enhance the teaching and learning process at tertiary level as the top and middle management would be able to capitalise on the crucial leadership behaviours that can facilitate staff's sense of efficacy, intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction.

### **Research questions**

With the statement of problem, gap and significance of research established, the following research questions were formulated to guide the current research:

- What were the descriptive statistics of transformational leadership behaviours in relation to gender, age and qualifications?
- Were there any significant differences for transformational leadership behaviours by way of gender, age and qualifications?
- What were the significant transformational leadership behaviours based on the hypothetical value of 3.5?
- What were the percentages of agreement in transformational leadership behaviours among department heads?

### **Methodology**

#### **Research design**

For this study, an online questionnaire was administered to collect data on staff's perceptions of the cruciality of transformational leadership behaviours among department heads at private tertiary institutions. According to Cleave (2021), a questionnaire has several advantages. It is cost efficient since it excludes the use of labour, paper, printing, phone or postage expenses. Its high scalability helps obtain responses/feedback quickly as it has a link and is downloadable. Since it maintains anonymity and confidentiality, respondents will be put at ease and motivated to answer truthfully. Its flexibility allows respondents to decide where and when to complete it, thus boosting the overall response rates. Lastly, it ensures data accuracy as the answers are automatically inserted into spreadsheets, databases, or other software packages, thus reducing human error while enabling automatic validation of data.

The Transformational Scale/Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) designed by Bass and Avolio (1995) was used to collect data; it contains short questions using the Likert scale, ranging from very crucial / crucial / uncertain / not crucial / not crucial at all. Bass and Avolio (1995) found that the reliability of the MLQ, for each leadership factor, ranged from 0.74 to 0.91. Its scores are measures of characteristics or behaviours of leaders including individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, idealised influence (attributed) and idealised influence (behaviour) associated with transformational 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 the MLQ and TLI transformational had significantly high convergent validity. Cronbach's Alpha interrater agreement and test-retest-reliability showed that internal consistencies of the MLQ were good, while interclass correlations for each of the nine leadership scales ranged from satisfactory or high.

**Scope of the study and sample**

The study was limited to 56 administrative and teaching staff from three private colleges in Sabah and Sarawak, as well as an Australian-based university in Sarawak. Deans, coordinators and department heads of nine colleges were contacted via email, but only 36 staff from three colleges and 20 staff from the university agreed to participate in the study by completing a questionnaire via email.

Staff were drawn from culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse communities in Sabah and Sarawak. They were recruited with the cooperation of deans, coordinators and department heads who agreed to share the survey link with staff. According to Roscoe (1975), a survey generally requires a sample size of at least 30 and should be 10 times the number of independent variables of the study. Since this study involved three independent variables (age, gender and qualifications), 56 subjects were deemed sufficient to yield reliable and valid results. The effect size of this sample at 0.5 level would be a moderate 0.78. According to the central limit theorem, the sample size was sufficient to provide reliable and valid information that applies to independent, identically distributed variables.

**Data collection and analysis**

Data collection was done by administering the questionnaire online. A spreadsheet was automatically generated and SPSS 26.0 was used to analyse data to address the research questions. Specifically, Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine whether significant differences existed in staff’s perceptions of the transformational behaviours among departments heads by way of gender, while Kruskal-Wallis H test was run to determine whether significant differences existed in staff’s perceptions of the transformational behaviours among departments heads by way of age and qualifications. A one-sample Wilcoxon test was run to determine if any of the transformational leadership items were significant at the hypothesised value of 3.5.

**Findings**

Table 1 presents the demographic information of staff pertaining to age, gender and qualifications. Male staff comprised 46 percent, while 54 percent were female. About 25 percent were 25 to 35 years old, 29 percent were 36 to 45 years old, 32 percent were 46 to 55 years old and 14 percent were 56 to 60 years old. About 7 percent had a diploma, 39 percent had bachelors, 29 percent had masters and 25 percent had a doctorate. Results showed that the mean score of transformational leadership behaviours was 62 for males and 60 for female (full score = 70), indicating that staff tended to perceive the cruciality of transformational leadership among department heads as average (see Table 1).

**Table 1 : Descriptive statistics of transformational style according to independent variables**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Percentage frequency</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Male	46.42%	62.15
Female	53.57%	60.23
<b>Age</b>	<b>Percentage frequency</b>	<b>Mean</b>
25-35	25.00%	58.93
36-45	28.57%	62.31
46-55	32.14%	62.44
56-60	14.29%	62.50
<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Percentage frequency</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Diploma	7.14%	60.00
Bachelors	39.29%	59.82
Masters	28.57%	62.38
PhD	25.00%	62.57

For mean value: High = 63-70; Average = 56-62; Low = 49-55

A Mann-Whitney U test showed no significant gender differences in transformational leadership, except for the 5 items with *p*-value less than 0.05 (see Table 2), where each of these 5 items has a significant

gender difference. A Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed that differences in transformational leadership in relation to age (see Table 3) and qualifications (see Table 4) were non-significant. Subsequently, a one-sample Wilcoxon test with 0.05 significant level was conducted to determine if each of the items for transformational leadership was significantly different from the hypothesized value of 3.5. Results showed that all of the items gave median values that were statistically significant and larger than 3.5. Therefore, in general, staff tended to choose the higher score for all of the transformational leadership items (see Table 5).

**Table 2 : Mann-Whitney U test: Was there any significance difference between gender?**

Item	<i>p</i> -value
Instil pride in staff for being associated with the organisation	0.037*
Articulate a compelling vision	0.011*
Express confidence on goal achievement	0.148
Seek different perspectives in problem solving	0.218
Suggest innovative ways to complete work	0.121
Allocate time on staff training	0.955
Treat staff as individuals rather than members of a group	0.552
Consider staff as having different needs, abilities or aspirations	0.038*
Go beyond self-interest for the good of staff	0.245
Help staff to develop their strengths	0.123
Display a sense of power and confidence in staff	0.430
Have a strong sense of purpose	0.018*
Emphasise importance of group mission	0.023*
Talk optimistically about the future	0.166

\*Significant at 0.05 level

**Table 3 : Kurskal-Wallis H test: Was there any significant difference between age?**

Item	<i>p</i> -value
Instil pride in staff for being associated with the organisation	0.968
Articulate a compelling vision	0.653
Express confidence on goal achievement	0.169
Seek different perspectives in problem solving	0.167
Suggest innovative ways to complete work	0.166
Allocate time on staff training	0.221
Treat staff as individuals rather than members of a group	0.810
Consider staff as having different needs, abilities or aspirations	0.817
Go beyond self-interest for the good of staff	0.351
Help staff to develop their strengths	0.170
Display a sense of power and confidence in staff	0.626
Have a strong sense of purpose	0.595
Emphasise importance of group mission	0.529
Talk optimistically about the future	0.993

**Table 4 : Kurskal-Wallis H test: Was there any significant difference between qualifications?**

Item	p-value
Instil pride in staff for being associated with the organisation	0.340
Articulate a compelling vision	0.114
Express confidence on goal achievement	0.493
Seek different perspectives in problem solving	0.195
Suggest innovative ways to complete work	0.871
Allocate time on staff training	0.582
Treat staff as individuals rather than members of a group	0.625
Consider staff as having different needs, abilities or aspirations	0.310
Go beyond self-interest for the good of staff	0.655
Help staff to develop their strengths	0.152
Display a sense of power and confidence in staff	0.876
Have a strong sense of purpose	0.366
Emphasise importance of group mission	0.170
Talk optimistically about the future	0.363

**Table 5 : Significance of transformational leadership items based on a test value of 3.5**

Item	p-value	Conclusion
Instil pride in staff for being associated with the organisation	< 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value
Articulate a compelling vision	< 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value
Express confidence on goal achievement	< 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value
Seek different perspectives in problem solving	< 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value
Suggest innovative ways to complete work	< 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value
Allocate time on staff training	< 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value
Treat staff as individuals rather than members of a group	< 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value
Consider staff as having different needs, abilities or aspirations	< 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value
Go beyond self-interest for the good of staff	< 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value
Help staff to develop their strengths	< 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value
Display a sense of power and confidence in staff	< 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value
Have a strong sense of purpose	< 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value
Emphasise importance of group mission	< 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value
Talk optimistically about the future	0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesised value

\*Significant at 0.05 level

Percentages of agreement (very crucial/crucial) were collapsed to gain a general view of staff's perceptions of the degree of cruciality of transformational leadership behaviours among department heads. About 93 percent of staff perceived that it was crucial for department heads to express confidence on goal achievement, while 97 percent perceived that it was crucial for them to suggest innovative ways to complete work. Approximately 91 percent viewed that it was crucial for department heads to allocate time for staff training and help staff to develop their strengths. Lastly, 90 percent perceived that it was crucial for department heads to demonstrate a strong sense of purpose, while 95 percent perceived that they should emphasise the importance of group mission. Overall, about 82 to 97 percent of staff perceived that department heads should exhibit all of the transformational leadership behaviours, except for treating staff as individuals rather than members of a group.

**Table 6: Percentages of agreement on the cruciality of transformational leadership behaviours**

Degree of cruciality	1	2	3	4	5
Instil pride in staff for being associated with the organisation	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	35.7%	51.8%
Articulate a compelling vision	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	37.5%	50.0%
Express confidence on goal achievement	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	39.3%	53.6%
Seek different perspectives in problem solving	1.8%	0.0%	8.9%	28.6%	60.7%
Suggest innovative ways to complete work	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	30.4%	62.5%
Allocate time on staff training	1.8%	0.0%	7.1%	30.4%	60.7%
Treat staff as individuals rather than members of a group	1.8%	5.4%	25.0%	23.2%	44.6%
Consider staff as having different needs, abilities or aspirations	0.0%	0.0%	10.7%	33.9%	55.4%
Go beyond self-interest for the good of staff	0.0%	1.8%	16.1%	39.3%	42.9%
Help staff to develop their strengths	0.0%	0.0%	8.9%	33.9%	57.1%
Display a sense of power and confidence in staff	0.0%	1.8%	8.9%	42.9%	46.4%
Have a strong sense of purpose	0.0%	0.0%	10.7%	28.6%	60.7%
Emphasise importance of group mission	0.0%	0.0%	5.4%	28.6%	66.1%
Talk optimistically about the future	0.0%	0.0%	10.7%	33.9%	55.4%

5 = Very crucial; 4 = Crucial; 3 = Uncertain; 2 = Not crucial; 1 = Not crucial at all

## Discussion and Recommendations

### No significant differences

This study revealed no significant differences in transformational leadership in terms of gender, age or qualifications. Findings were supported by previous research, for example, Karimi and Morshedi (2015) who examined the relationship between transformational leadership and organisational innovation among faculty members, found no significant differences in transformational leadership based on gender, age or qualifications. Further, Haj and Jubran (2016) who examined the impact of school principals' transformational leadership on the job satisfaction of secondary school teachers found no significant differences in transformational leadership due to gender, academic qualifications, job experience or school level.

Munir and Aboidullah (2018) who examined the relationship between school principals' transformational leadership and teachers' academic effectiveness found no significant gender differences in transformational leadership behaviours. Apore and Asamoah (2019) who examined emotional intelligence, gender and transformational leadership among nurses in emerging economies found no significant differences in transformational leadership due to gender. Lastly, Mangisa, Schultz and van

Hoek (2020) who examined the transformational leadership, talent acquisition and talent retention of engineers at an energy provider also found no significant differences in transformational leadership in relation to gender and educational qualifications.

### **Implications**

Results indicated that staff tended to perceive the cruciality of transformational leadership of department heads as average. Nevertheless, the results from the one-sample Wilcoxon test reflected that staff tended to choose the higher score for all of the transformational leadership items. Druskat (1994) who examined the transformational and transactional leadership among 6,359 subordinates of leaders at all-male and all-female organisations found that both male and female leaders exhibited more transformational than transactional leadership behaviours, while both male and female subordinates were more satisfied with transformational leadership. Similarly, Mushtaq and Akhtar (2014) found that transformational leadership style was the most frequently used by department heads.

Chen et al. (2018) summarised that many studies revealed a positive linear relationship between transformational leadership and desirable individual and organisational outcomes; as a beneficial antecedent variable, it was positively related to emotional intelligence, task performance, organisational citizenship and organisational commitment. and. It was also positively associated with occupational safety, team performance and team innovation.

Lastly, Jaroliya and Gyanchandani (2022) maintained that strong transformational leadership greatly contributes to improving team performance and productivity. Findings of the study implied that staff at private tertiary institutions tended to perceive that it is crucial for department heads to demonstrate transformational leadership behaviours that will not only encourage them to execute their tasks with full zeal, but also to eventually become leaders themselves. The staff also tended to prefer department heads who are responsive and empowering, thus making them feel inspired and enthused.

### **Limitations of this study and recommendations**

Although yielding useful information, this study is limited because findings cannot be generalised with the small sample ( $n = 56$ ) and a questionnaire was used to collect data. Future research should use larger, randomised samples to increase the probability of obtaining more reliable data. Data from other Malaysian states can be gathered in order to have a more representative sample. Further, the use of an online questionnaire might result in biased responses since it was difficult to totally control internal validity threats. Follow-up interviews can be conducted to get more details that could further support the findings.

The research highlights the importance of transformational leadership. According to Michigan State University (2022), individuals who strive to become effective transformational leaders should develop at least seven skills. First, they must become more open to new thinking by constantly seeking opportunities to do things differently and welcoming new ideas. Second, they must have talent for broadening minds by modifying staff's perceptions on how things should work, while deciphering the logic that governs their mindsets. Third, they must practise active listening by hearing ideas with an open mind and responding without judgment, self-censoring or finality so that staff feel seen, understood and respected.

Fourth, to be transformational, they must show tolerance for intelligent risks by considering what they might mean for the organisation's future. Fifth, they must have the willingness to accept responsibility for all the decisions, besides approving the ideas of others. Sixth, they trust their team members and give them freedom to brainstorm and shape novel ideas, thus allowing them to define their own steps to success. Lastly, they have the ability to inspire participation by modelling universal creativity and innovation to every staff. Treating everyone as persons with ideas, they encourage staff to recognise thoughts and ideas, even when they do not yield impressive results.

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