

The Impact of Transformational and Transactional Leadership on Organisational Commitment in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

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Abstract: This study was conducted to explore the relationship between leadership styles and organizational commitment in the manufacturing sector in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia. This study utilizes survey methods via questionnaires that involve 452 respondents. Findings from regression analysis show that both transformational and transactional leadership styles have a significant impact on organizational commitment in the manufacturing sector in Malaysian SME firms, especially transformational leadership. Hence, SME management teams are advised not to neglect the aspect of leadership styles in efforts to increase their organization's performance.

Keywords: *Transformational, Transactional Leadership Styles, Organisational Commitment, SMEs.*

1. Introduction and Background

The Malaysian Government has introduced various policies to spur the growth of SMEs such as launching a series of transformational programs to assist the growth of SME firms in facing fierce competition in the global market. Among the aspects that are the focus include innovation, human capital, market access and financing. These efforts have raised SMEs' contribution to the nation's economy to 38.4% in 2022 compared to 37.4% in 2021. The biggest contribution of SMEs is the generation of employment opportunities for the locals. SME firms provide job opportunities to more than 7 million people in 2022 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). The capability of the SME sector to absorb substantial employment shows that SME is one of the important sectors in boosting the Nation's economic development (Adan & Hussain, 2021; Surya et al., 2021).

A review of past studies found that the organization's performance depends on the extent of the employee's commitment to the organization. According to Bucăța et al. (2022), organisational commitment is an important predictor in determining an organization's effectiveness and is needed by each firm to remain productive. Organizational commitment is needed more than ever, especially in a volatile market. (Nijhof et al., 1998). Researchers such as Lo et al. (2024); and Salleh et al. (2008) assert that a committed employee contributes to a competitive advantage and reduces the firm's operating cost as they are likely to execute tasks exceeding their task description, provide the best service to clients, and are more motivated in performing tasks. Furthermore, they continuously try to raise their work performance (Manshor et al., 2020). Hence as stated by Allen, & Meyer (1990) study findings by Al Balushi et al. (2022); and Guzeller & Celiker (2020), organizations that possess committed employees are expected to experience lower employee turnover and turnover intention rates.

Realizing how important organizational commitment is to the continuity of SME firms, studies on this need to be given attention, especially in determining predictors of organizational commitment in SME firms. Highlights from the literature indicate that many researchers attempt to identify factors that contribute to organizational commitment. Among these are motivational factors (Bytyqi, 2020; Pongpeng & Pongpeng, 2022; Siregar, 2022), work satisfaction (Bashir & Gani, 2020; Gopinath, 2020; Hiola & Hanurawan, 2022), empowerment (AlKahtani et al., 2021; Fragkos et al., 2020; Kyei-Frimpon et al., 2024), emotional intelligence (Al-Oweidat et al., 2023; Chigeda et al., 2022, ethics (Alam et al., 2021; Grabowski, et al. 2019, job characteristics (Ahmad, 2018; Okonkwo et al., 2019; Ramli et al., 2020), personnel characteristics (Aldiabt, 2023; Korankye et al., 2021), human resource management (Gaung, 2022; Noor et al., 2023; Oliveira & Honorio, 2020), organisational justice

(Jang et al., 2021; Manshor et al., 2016; Unaam & Benjamin, 2021) and leadership (Adekoya & Guobiazor, 2023; Kim, & Oh, 2023; Zainuddin & Asaari, 2020).

Wang (2023) Asserts that leadership styles are a main contributing factor in the attitude and behavior of employees towards the organization. This view is supported by studies conducted by Uriah & Amadi (2019) and Razak et al. (2018) found that leadership styles contributed to the increase in motivation, commitment, performance as well as employee productivity. Because individual and organizational performance can be influenced by transformational and transactional leadership styles, the question is, are both leadership styles equal in terms of impact on organizational commitment? Researchers such as Avolio et al. (2009) explain that development and current progress in leadership research are still attempting to understand how and when transformational and transactional leadership styles are more effective in a given firm. Not many empirical studies focus on which leadership style is more effective on employee organizational commitment in a firm (Keskes, 2014; Kungwola, 2023; Tianyang, et al., 2023).

Past study results related to transformational and transactional leadership on employees' attitudes and behavior are still unclear and inconsistent and show that the matter is still under debate. In addition, most researchers stress the transformational leadership style in the SME sector (Jabeen, 2022; Yunus & Ibrahim, 2015; Wu, 2022). This study utilizes the social exchange theory to explain the influence of leadership styles on the attitudes and behavior of employees in the organization. The social exchange theory explains that organizational commitment depends on how firms take care of and pay attention to their employees (Arshad & Zawawi, 2010). In the exchange process, employees will increase their obligations towards their duties due to feelings of gratitude towards the organization (Blau, 1964). Studies have been conducted to obtain new evidence about the roles of both leadership styles on employee organizational commitment. Hence, the first objective of this study is to investigate the impact of transformational and transactional leadership styles on organizational commitment among SME employees. The second objective is to answer the question of which leadership style is more dominant in influencing organizational commitment.

Even though SME firms are the main contributor to the nation's economic development, the performance of SME firms has not reached the targeted levels. SMEs still face low employee productivity which is relatively lower as compared to big companies (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). This low employee productivity impacts the development of SMEs in Malaysia (Salleh & Ndubisi, 2006). It is estimated that in 2011 the average productivity was about RM50,498 per worker versus the average productivity of big companies which is RM140,691 per worker (National SME Development Council, 2012). With regards to this, the National Master Plan targets the increase of productivity for each worker to RM91,000 by 2020 (National SME Development Council, 2012). SMEs continue to encounter significant challenges in terms of ensuring high-quality jobs that result in the intended organizational output (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Asri (2023) Asserts that productivity is the main issue that is frequently faced in a firm. Hence various efforts have been implemented in the recruitment, selection, placement and training of employees by SME management (Abraham, 2020; Baharum et al., 2006).

Various factors influence productivity in SME firms, including the attitude and behavior of employees such as motivation level, commitment and low work satisfaction (Krishna et al., 2023; Yusof & Imm, 2020). According to Rahman et al. (2014) when the level of motivation and commitment is low, SME employees are prone to counterproductive behaviors such as disciplinary, dishonesty and absenteeism problems. According to Lo et al. (2009), an uncommitted employee is more likely to leave the organization. Because organizational commitment is one of the main factors in driving productivity in SME firms, the factors that influence organizational commitment in SME firms need to be researched. There are several studies on leadership styles and organizational commitment. For example, Lo et al. (2009) assert that leadership style is an important factor that contributes to the employees' attitudes and behavior toward the organization. This view is supported by studies by Ibrahim (2023), Kashefi et al. (2013), Lo et al. (2010) and Roy et al. (2021). They found that leadership style contributes to the increase in employees' motivation, commitment, performance and productivity. According to Mwakajila & Nyello, (2021) and Yunus & Ibrahim (2015), the leadership style at SME firms determines the success of achieving the firm's goals by bringing about positive change in the employees' behavior.

Price (1997) further outlines that employees will be more committed if they have confidence in the leader. This means the stronger the trust of the employees towards the employer, the higher the level of loyalty towards the organization (Garg & Ramjee, 2013). However, there is a lack of research relating to leadership and organizational commitment in Malaysia (Yunus & Ibrahim, 2015), especially in SME firms. Past research that studied the relationship between leadership and organizational commitment was conducted in other sectors, for instance, studies by Hasbullah (2008) were conducted among employees of the Malaysian Co-operative Societies Commission in Peninsular Malaysia. Also, studies by Aghashahi et al. (2013), and Lo, Ramayah, Min, and Songan (2010) were conducted in the Kuala Lumpur services sector and multinational companies in East Malaysia. The findings of their studies show that there is a significant relationship between leadership and organizational commitment. Lo (2010) proposed that leadership in the manufacturing sector should seriously give more attention to the factor of leadership style, as effective leadership plays an important role in increasing the motivation, inspiration and performance of an organization. Although the latest studies emphasize transformational leadership and organizational commitment, the importance of transactional leadership cannot be neglected.

Researchers such as Aziz (2010) assert that both transformational and transactional leadership are the best leadership in influencing business performance. He proposed that employers should improve leadership skills to ensure the firm's objective is achieved. This view is supported by Alrowwad et al. (2020) and Klein (2023) that found transformational and transactional leadership have a positive relationship between individuals and organizational performance. Based on these issues, this study aims to close the gap from previous studies by giving attention to the leadership styles and employees' organizational commitment in the manufacturing sector of SME firms.

2. Literature Review

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is a variable that is frequently studied in attitude studies. (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1984; Tarigan & Ariani, 2015). Mowday et al. (1979) characterized organizational commitment into three key characteristics which are a strong belief and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, a willingness to fulfill responsibilities for the sake of the organization, and a determination to maintain membership in the organization (Mowday, 1998). This model is also known as affective commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990) or attitudes (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

Allen & Meyer (1990) divides commitment into three main components, which are affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. The main characteristic of a high affective commitment is illustrated by the attitudes of an individual who tries to identify, engage himself/herself and be happy with his/her membership in an organization. Continuance commitment is linked with the consideration of the profitability if one remains with the organization, and the cost that is incurred if one leaves the organization. The normative commitment component emphasizes more on the moral aspects which is the responsibility to remain with the organization as it is considered as an action that is correct, moral and worthwhile.

This study only focuses on affective commitment as it is the most widely researched construct and is considered an effective measure in explaining employees' commitment to a firm compared to other constructs (Almohtasb et al., 2021; Lavelle et al., 2009; Nguyen et al., 2020). Also, affective commitment is an important determinant of employees' dedication and loyalty to the firm (Almıaçık et al., 2012; Kaur & Mittal, 2020). Why are organizational commitment studies still relevant in the era of globalization? In the world of globalization, each organization faces new challenges to sustain productivity and create a committed workforce (Dixit & Bhati, 2012). Even though studies on organizational commitment have spanned four decades, it remains a key area that continues to attract the interest of researchers and practitioners (Somers, 2009). Organizational commitment is seen as the most challenging concept in the area of organizational management and behavior (Dixit & Bhati, 2012). In that regard, as highlighted by Nehmeh (2009) and Eliyana (2019), organizations with a committed workforce are seen as the main factor in achieving a more competitive performance because committed employees of the organization will contribute greater efforts in carrying out their duties.

Leadership Styles Model

The full-range leadership model proposed by Burns (1978) is known as the transformational-transactional leadership theory. Bodla & Nawaz (2010) explain that the transformational and transactional leadership styles have been continuously put to the test by various researchers. Bass (1985) describes transformational leadership as consisting of four different factors: charisma, inspiration, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. Charisma is an agent of change or becomes a role model by creating understanding through vision sharing and developing a sense of pride and trust in followers to overcome obstacles. This theory was expanded in 1990 by Bass and Avolio with the proposal of a nine-factor model (charisma, inspirational leadership, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, contingent rewards and management-by-exception) as the features inherent in transformational and transactional leadership.

Bass & Avolio (1990) revised the theory of leadership and proposed a new leadership theory known as full-range leadership theory (FLRT). This FLRT construct consists of three types of leadership behavior namely transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire represented by nine different factors. The FLRT theory comprises five transformational leadership factors (intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration and idealized influence of attribute and idealized influence of behavior), three transactional leadership factors (contingent reward, passive management-by-exception and management-by-exception) and lastly, laissez-faire.

In 1993, Bass and Avolio modified the concept of leadership into seven leadership factors (idealized influences, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, contingent reward, passive management-by-exception, active management-by-exception and laissez-faire). Nevertheless, Bass & Avolio (1994) once again revamped the form of active and passive leadership from seven leadership factors to eight leadership factors. In 1995, Bass & Avolio added the Laissez-faire leadership style factor and separated the idealized influence factor into the idealized influence of attributes and idealized influence of behavior. Due to various leadership factors, many researchers use different leadership scales in their studies (Bass & Avolio 2004). Hence, Bass & Avolio (2004) revised the leadership style dimensions and produced the up-to-date version of a leadership style consisting of the nine factors or the full range leadership model. This model consists of five transformational leadership style factors: the idealized influence of attributes, the idealized influence of behavior, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, the two factors of the transactional leadership style are contingent reward and management-by-exception (active) and two factors of the passive-avoidant leadership style are management-by-exception (passive) and laissez-faire leadership style.

This leadership model focuses on the various types of leadership from transformational leadership to passive/avoidant leadership (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010). The full-range leadership theory is a leadership model that is widely studied and endorsed by many researchers around the world (Deng et al., 2023) and is one of the contemporary leadership theories (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010). However, it is found that most researchers only investigate the full-range leadership model in different cultures and occupations (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010). Therefore, this study uses a leadership model consisting of two types of leadership styles namely transformational and transactional leadership. In addition, the study by Mwakajila & Nyello (2021), and Aziz (2010) revealed that transformational and transactional leadership is a superior leadership style as shown by the owners of SME firms.

According to Bass & Avolio (2004) and Batista-Foguet et al. (2021), the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) is an instrument that is widely used to measure employers' behavior. Based on the findings of previous studies, the consistency value of the MLQ model for transformational and transactional items is high and consistent, for example, the reliability value of several studies is above the minimum value of reliability, $\alpha = 0.70$. For instance, research on SMEs by Arham (2014), Aziz (2010), and Zin (2012), shows a high reliability (α) value for transformational leadership, as much as 0.89 to 0.90.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is defined as an interactive interaction between the employer and employee, where each of them has a moral level beyond personal interest to achieve the firm's goals (Bass, 1998). Transformational leadership encourages its followers to carry out their duties over their self-interest for the

good of the group and firm (Bass, 1990; Burn, 1978), to act as a trainer or mentor to each follower by giving particular attention to the needs, achievements and growth of followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006) as well as to act as an innovative problem solver and playing a role in the development of employee capabilities through guidance, challenges and support (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Flexible systems are used by employers to adapt to the development and change in the firm's environment (Kawatra & Krishnan, 2004; Shafie et al., 2013).

Transactional Leadership

Bass (1985) defines transactional leadership as an exchange-based oriented leadership. According to Bass & Avolio (2006), transactional leadership involves transactions or exchanges that occur among employees, working groups, and employers. This exchange is based on discussions between employers employees and others through the setting of conditions and rewards. In the same sense, transactional leadership is an exchange between employer and employees through the provision of a reward to obtain something in return through the exchange of benefits with their employees (Gardiner, 2006). In that respect, the rewards will be received by the workers and the parties involved if they meet the criteria set out in the exchange process (Bass & Riggio, 2006). An employee's positive performance will be rewarded with a good reward while workers displaying a lower work performance will be given appropriate action (Manzoor et al., 2021; Noorazem et al., 2021).

Transformational and Transactional Leadership on Organisational Commitment

Although many recent studies focus on transformational leadership and organizational commitment, the importance of transactional leadership cannot be neglected. Researchers such as Aziz (2010) claim that both transformational and transactional leadership are superior leadership styles in influencing business performance. He suggested that employers need to improve their leadership skills to ensure the firm's goals are achieved. This view is supported by Alrowwad et al. (2020) and Klein (2023), who found that transformational and transactional leadership have a positive relationship with individual and organizational performance. Since the performance of individuals and organizations can be influenced by transformative and transactional leadership styles, the question is, do both styles of leadership have the same effect on organizational commitment?

The study by Ahmad & Gelaidan (2011) uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches in analyzing organizational culture, leadership style and commitment to change. Their study was conducted among 371 public sector employees in Yemen. The findings show that both transformational and transactional leadership have a significant relationship to the commitment towards change but the findings are rather surprising where transactional leadership is the strongest predictor of commitment to change as opposed to transformational leadership. This finding is supported by Fasola, Adeyemi & Olowe (2013), from results of a study conducted among bank workers in Nigeria that indicate transformational leadership has no significant relationship to organizational commitment. Conversely, their study shows that transactional leadership has more impact on organizational commitment. However, a study by Lo (2010) in a manufacturing company in East Malaysia found that the dimensions of transactional leadership style had no significant impact on organizational commitment components. Their findings have also proven that only transformational leadership has a significant and stronger relationship to organizational commitment.

There is other evidence that several Western studies also focus more on transformational leadership than transactional leadership. Among them is the study by Mesu et al. (2015) which outlines the impact of transformational leadership on organizational commitment among 588 employees in the manufacturing and services sector of SME firms in the Netherlands. Their findings show that transformational leadership that refers to visionary leadership dimensions and development stimuli only has a positive relationship with organizational commitment in the SME services sector. Another study was conducted by Herold et al. (2008) consisting of 343 employees from various industries encompassing 30 organizations in the United States. In this study, they examined the relationship between transformational leadership, leadership change and follower commitment. Their findings show that transformational leadership has a stronger relationship with the followers' change in commitment as opposed to the change of specific leadership practices. A study in Malaysia by Yunus & Ibrahim (2015) among employees of SME firms in Shah Alam proves that only one dimension of transformational leadership, which is individualized consideration, has a significant relationship to affective commitment. While studies by Khalil, et al. (2022) examined transformational leadership among

small-scale enterprises in Malaysia. They explain that leaders need to form an appropriate leadership style to apply in the organization to ensure followers can align with the goals of the firm.

Transformational leadership forms the long-term relationship between leaders and followers and creates strategic and organization-oriented interaction (Herold et al., 2008; Klein, 2023). Transformational and transactional leadership, organizational support and environmental competition intensity as antecedents of intrapreneurial behaviors. While there are studies that examine the relationship between leadership styles and organizational commitment, these studies are not comprehensive because they focus only on transformational leadership factors by sidelining the role of transactional leadership. For example, a study conducted in Turkey by Tuna et al. (2011) focused only on employee perceptions of the impact of transformational leadership on organizational commitment by ignoring other leadership factors such as transactional leadership. Their findings show that transformational leadership characteristics can increase loyalty and reduce employee turnover rates. In addition, researchers in China and Korea also focus on transformational leadership rather than transactional leadership factors on organizational commitment, including studies by Huang & Hsin (2023), Kim & Shin (2019) and Shim et al. (2015). Based on the results of previous studies on transformational and transactional leadership on employees' attitudes and behaviors the findings are still unclear and inconsistent, thus this indicates that the subject still needs to be researched.

The hypothesis for this study is as follows:

H1: Leadership style has a direct significant impact on organizational commitment.

H2: Transformational leadership style has a direct significant impact on organizational commitment.

H3: Transactional leadership style has a direct significant impact on organizational commitment.

3. Research Methodology

The population for this study is estimated at 157,000 full-time employees working in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) firms. A total of 452 employees in the manufacturing sector were involved in this study. The questionnaires were distributed to the participants and filled in at a meeting in the presence of the researcher. This gave the participants to raise questions related to the content of the survey (Krogstie & Andersson, 2012).

Both leadership style variables will be measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) by Bass & Avolio (2004). The MLQ contains 28 items related to transformational leadership and transaction leadership. The MLQ consists of two sets of measurements, i.e., the followers set, and the leaders set. This study uses a set of measurements for followers where respondents will assess and measure the behavior of leaders within the organization by using the 7-point Likert scale technique (Never to Always). In general, the transformational leadership style is measured using 20 items. While the transactional leadership style contains eight items.

Organizational commitment is measured in terms of affective commitment by using the scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). The Allen and Meyer measurement scale is the best measurement tool and has been empirically certified by many studies around the world (Khajuria & Khan, 2022). The measurement contains 8 items using a Likert scale of 1 to 7 points (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). A study by Efthymiopoulos & Goula (2024) reported a relatively high-reliability coefficient of 0.95. Likewise, the study conducted in Malaysia by Karim & Noor (2017) also produced a high-reliability coefficient of 0.81 for the affective commitment scale.

4. Results and Discussion

Comparison of Transformational and Transactional Leadership Dimension Mean Score

Table 1 shows the mean score and standard deviation for the transformational leadership dimension factors and the two transactional leadership factors. The mean score of the transformational leadership dimensions in order is intellectual stimulation ($M = 4.132$), inspirational motivation ($M = 4.326$), individual consideration (4.188) and idealized influence of attitude and behavior ($M = 4.219$) which are all at a moderate mean score level. The mean scores for transactional leadership dimensions are: contingent reward ($M = 4.1394$), and passive management-by-exception ($M = 4.2317$) are also at a moderate mean score level.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation table for transformational and transactional leadership dimensions

Leadership Styles Dimensions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Transformational Leadership Dimension						
Intellectual Dimension	452	1.50	6.50	4.1372	1.02179	Moderate
Inspirational Motivation	452	1.50	7.00	4.3269	1.02195	Moderate
Individualized Consideration	452	1.50	6.75	4.1886	1.00067	Moderate
Idealized Influence (Behaviour)	452	1.63	6.13	4.2196	.93972	Moderate
Transactional Leadership Dimensions						
Contingent Reward	452	1.00	7.00	4.1394	1.04602	Moderate
Passive Management-by-Exception	452	1.00	7.00	4.2317	.98721	Moderate
Valid N (listwise)	452					

Relationship Between Leadership Styles and Organisational Commitment

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the relationship between transformational leadership and transactional leadership on organizational commitment. Table 2 shows how leadership styles directly affect organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.712$; $p < 0.001$). Further analysis confirms that both dimensions of transformational leadership and transactional leadership have a significant relationship with organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.545$, $p < 0.001$) and ($\beta = 0.201$, $p < 0.001$). Based on this finding, hypothesis statements H1, H2 and H3 are accepted.

The findings are also in line with the findings of Chih & Lin (2009) in Taiwan's High Technology Industries. The difference is that this study showed that leadership styles had a greater impact on organizational commitment among employees in SMEs with β values of 0.712 ($p < 0.001$), compared to the study by Chih & Lin (2009) with β values of 0.338 ($p < 0.001$). The findings also show that transformational leadership has a significant impact on organizational commitment with β value of 0.545 ($p < 0.001$). This is consistent with the findings of Saeed et al. (2013) in the Yemen education sector and Bučiūnienė, & Škudienė (2008) in Lithuania manufacturing firms, each with β values of 0.204 ($p < 0.01$) and 0.527 ($p < 0.01$) respectively.

The results additionally indicate a significant correlation between transactional leadership and organizational commitment, with a β value of 0.201 ($p < 0.001$). These results support the findings of Saeed et al. (2013) and Bučiūnienė & Škudienė (2008), which demonstrated that there is a strong association between transactional leadership and organizational commitment. The β value for this relationship is 0.429 ($p < 0.01$) and 0.408 ($p < 0.01$), respectively.

The disclosure summary for each independent variable (transformational leadership and transactional leadership) towards the dependent variable (organizational commitment) is significant and hypotheses are accepted by referring to the β -value and the p-value. To interpret the β -value, the positive beta coefficient means that there is an increase in the independent variable, which is associated with an increase in the dependent variable. As for the p-value, this study showed $p < 0.01$, which indicated strong evidence of the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

Table 2: The effect of Leadership Style on Organisational Commitment

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R ²	F Value	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
Leadership Style	Organizational Commitment	0.507	463.225	0.712	21.523	.000
Transformational Leadership	Organizational Commitment	0.507	231.225	0.545	10.473	.000
Transactional Leadership				0.201	3.870	

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In the context of the manufacturing sector in SME firms, transformational leadership and transactional leadership also play a role in influencing employee commitment. This means employers need to emphasize leadership that is oriented to an exchange-based system between employers and employees, to motivate employees through reward and punishment to help increase employee commitment at SME firms. The important matter that can be put forward through this study is that transformational leadership style has more impact compared to transactional leadership. SMEs are advised to prioritize transformational leadership as opposed to transactional leadership in managing human resources through the involvement of employees in developing the organization and thus assisting in achieving the organization's goals. Employers of SMEs can boost their workforce's commitment by sharing the organization's vision, setting clear goals, encouraging workers to do better at work, and implementing innovative management techniques.

To that end, the government is advised, through its agencies such as SME Corporation and SME Development Council, to extend training programs on human resource development and leadership skills to employers at SME firms. Often, elements that are given attention in the SME development programs are only relevant to the provision of infrastructure facilities, product marketing, and product research and development (R&D) activities. To increase SMEs' contribution to the nation's economic development, the Malaysian government and its agencies need to realize that the provision of training to employers about leadership, especially transformational leadership can influence the performance of SMEs in Malaysia. In addition, governments should actively support and facilitate SMEs in their efforts to implement workplace innovation and process optimization. An effective strategy is to provide financial support in the form of subsidies to companies that employ consultants or experts who specialize in methods designed to improve the organization's efficiency. This strategy not only fosters continuous improvement but also cultivates a culture of excellence and innovation inside the SME sector.

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