

**Leadership and Organizational Commitment:
The Case of a Thai Private University**

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between transformational and transactional leadership behaviors by Thai private university deans and directors and faculty's level of organizational commitment. Of the 362 Thai full-time faculty members who received the survey, 344 returned it for a 95% response rate. Stepwise regression analysis was used to determine the impact of leadership behaviors on the level of organizational commitment. The findings revealed that all aspects of transformational leadership behaviors and two leadership behaviors of transactional leadership (contingent reward and active-management by exception) were positively correlated with the level of organizational commitment. In the regression analysis, we found that contingency reward, passive-management by exception, and intellectual stimulation were the factors that most significantly affected organizational commitment among the faculty. The influence of leadership on faculty organizational commitment was discussed in light of these findings.

Keywords: Transformational and transactional leadership, organizational commitment, faculty, higher education, private university, Thailand

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Thai higher education has been undergoing change due to reform of Thai education to reach the goal of becoming the regional education hub in South East Asia. Therefore, improvement of higher education has been emphasized in several aspects, including quality of graduates, quality of faculty, quality of researchers, and quality of educational providers (OHEC, 2009). A crucial aspect in achieving this goal is faculty, prompting the need for Thai universities to pay attention to faculty as they play a central role in helping universities achieve institutional goals (Ruben, 2005).

However, the problems associated with lack of organizational commitment among faculty have been receiving attention in higher education (Tabbodi, 2009). A number of studies have suggested that leadership style is one of the factors influencing employees' level of organizational commitment (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Walumbwa, Orwa, Wang, & Lawler, 2005). Leadership style, thus, is also important for universities to survive in today's economic and policy climate (Davies, Hides, & Casey, 2001). University leaders play a role in embracing changes (Turnbull & Edwards, 2005), especially the role of deans, as they are the closest mediator in the employment environment to ensure satisfaction and commitment among faculty members (Clinebell, Škudienė, & Trijonyte, 2013). To respond to educational and economic changes in Thailand, it is essential to explore leadership styles of deans and the impact of it on the level of organizational commitment among Thai faculty.

Research Problem

In this study, we determined the relationship between Bass's leadership styles and the level of organizational commitment among Thai faculty and identified the impact of appropriate leadership behaviors of deans or directors on Thai faculty in order to improve the level of organizational commitment in a Thai private university context.

Significance of the Problem

The results from this study should further the theoretical framework of Bass's (1997) leadership styles and Mowday, Steers, and Porter's (1982) concept of organizational commitment. Moreover, it broadens the implementation scope of the theoretical concepts by encompassing a private higher educational context in Thailand.

The outcomes of this study provide information about the effects of perceived effective leadership styles on the faculty's level of organizational commitment in order to develop the organization by focusing on the administrators' roles and leadership development.

Theoretical Foundations

This study was based on two theoretical foundations—transformational and transactional leadership theory and organizational commitment theory.

Transformational and Transactional Leadership Theory

Bass (1997) identified four components of transformational leadership behaviors: (a) *Idealized influence* describes leaders who serve as role models who are admired, respected, and trusted by their followers. The relationship between the leader and follower is based on personal understanding and sharing risks with followers. (b) *Inspirational motivation* describes leaders who provide meaning and

challenge to their followers' work. They also communicate with high expectations and inspire followers to work as a team in order to meet organizational goals. (c) *Intellectual stimulation* describes leaders who stimulate followers to be creative, innovative, and systematic by questioning assumptions and constructing new approaches in solving problems without criticizing followers in public if mistakes are made. (d) *Individualized consideration* describes leaders who pay attention individually to followers' needs and provide a supportive environment. The leaders also treat their followers in unique ways to develop each individual to a higher level of their potential.

At the same time, transactional leadership consists of three components: (a) *Contingent reward* describes leaders who make clear what their followers will receive in exchange for rewards for accomplishing agreed-on objectives. The leaders clarify goals, work standards, and assignments to their followers. They energize followers to reach organizational objectives through extrinsic rewards; (b) *Active management-by-exception* describes leaders who allow the status quo to exist if the old ways are working but monitor and ensure that mistakes are not made; and (c) *Passive management-by-exception* describes leaders who intervene only when mistakes occur or when standards are not met (Bass, 1997).

Organizational Commitment

Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) defined organizational commitment focusing on commitment-related behaviors. It represents individuals who become "bound by his actions" or "behaviors that exceed formal and/normative expectations" (p. 225). Another focus was commitment with respect to an attitude: "a state where an individual identifies with a particular organization and its goals and wishes to maintain membership in order to facilitate these goals" (p. 225). They also pointed out

that organizational commitment was more stable than job satisfaction and grew continuously over time among employees. They purposed three major organizational commitments aspects comprising of: (a) A strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (b) A willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (c) A definite desire to maintain organizational membership (Mowday et al., 1979).

Operational Definition

The context of this study is within a private higher educational institution in Thailand. For purposes of this study, two leadership styles (transformational and transactional) and organizational commitment are operationally defined as follows.

Transformational Leadership

This leadership style, in this context, refers to deans/directors who motivate, inspire, and empower faculty performance by increasing expectations of the outcomes, encouraging faculty to look at problems/situations in a new way, and elevating their faculty's needs in terms of self-interest.

Transactional Leadership

This leadership style refers to deans/directors who identify faculty needs and exchange rewards in return their level of effort and performance toward their institution. It also refers to the way in which they deal with discipline when mistakes are made; they either monitor them to ensure that mistakes are not made, or they intervene only when mistakes are made..

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment refers to faculty perceptions of their identification with their institution and their level of involvement in the institution. It also includes the intention to depart from their institution.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: There is no relationship between each transformational leadership component and aggregate transformational leadership behavior of deans/directors and faculty's organizational commitment.

H₂: There is no relationship between each component and aggregate transactional leadership behavior of deans/directors and faculty's organizational commitment.

H₃: No combination of leadership behaviors by deans/directors from both transformational and transactional leadership styles has an effect on faculty's organizational commitment.

Literature Review

In this section, we review literature on the relationship between organizational commitment and two leadership styles: transformational and transactional.

Organizational Commitment and Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that creates valuable and positive change from followers (Bass, 1997). Further, this particular leadership style has a positive relationship with individuals' motivation at work (Masi & Cooke, 2000), as well as the potential to enhance followers' respect (Lee, 2005). Such behaviors have been found to be associated with the level of organizational commitment (Emery & Barker, 2007; Masi & Cooke, 2000; Rowden, 2000; Seltzer & Bass, 1990). Studies in Thailand have also shown a positive relationship between transformational leadership style and organizational commitment of employees (Chongvisal, 2002; Newchantuek, 2002; Nilpan, 2000).

In educational contexts, transformational leadership behaviors have been a popular image of ideal practice (Hallinger, 2003). Turnbull and Edwards (2005) suggested a need for universities to adopt a transformational leadership style. The leadership model that has been relied upon heavily in published research in educational settings has been Bass's leadership model (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

However, academic leadership may be fundamentally different from business leadership, the intended target of Bass's work (Spendlove, 2007). Therefore, transferring business practices directly into universities may not be appropriate (McIlhatton, Johnson, & Holden, 1993). There have been numerous studies confirming the effect of transformational leadership on teachers' level of commitment, although those studies were conducted in different countries (Khasawneh, Omari, & Abu-Tineh, 2012; Nguni, Slegers, & Denessen, 2006; Ross & Gray, 2004; Yu, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2002).

In the Thai educational context, Boonyarit, Chomphupart, and Arin (2010) conducted a study about leadership styles and organizational commitment on public teachers at the secondary level; their findings indicated a positive relationship. For studies conducted specifically in higher education, Johnsrud and Rossen (2002) confirmed the relationship between leader and faculty. They also found that leadership style of the leader had an influence on faculty's intention to leave an institution. Brow and Moschavi (2002) found that all dimensions of transformational leadership behaviors had a positive relation to faculty's job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was also related to organizational commitment among faculty members (Malik, Nawab, & Naeem, 2010).

Despite the published studies about transformational leadership, the cultural impact is often not considered. Hallinger and Kantamara (2000) pointed out in their

study that, within the educational change in Thailand, practitioners often learn western frameworks that lack cultural validity. Therefore, it is essential to consider cultural factors in this study. Three key cultural factors affecting Thai leadership style are the influence of organizational elders, catalysts for change, and the influence of young people (Prideaux, 2012). Similarly, Selvarajah, Meyer, and Donovan (2013) suggested that the influence on excellent leadership in Thailand was mediated by culture-based constructs of respect, deference for authority, and non-confrontation. Hallinger (2004) indicated that, in the Thai educational setting, there were large differences in power between followers and leaders, and it was because they are members of a high power distance culture (Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Hofstede, 1980). Transformational leadership style is frequently associated with a flatter organizational and low power distance environment as in western firms (Chen, 2004). Chen and Francesco (2000) also pointed out that transformational leadership might not suit Asian cultures compared with western companies, as most Asian organizational cultures are regarded as bureaucratic and hierarchical.

Organizational Commitment and Transactional Leadership

In past research, it was found that Thai employees were familiar with a tradition of top-down management; therefore, Thai employees felt uncomfortable in a participative work environment (Komin, 1990; Kumbanaruk, 1987; Rohitratana, 1998). This is influenced by the high power distance culture of the country. In such a culture, Brazier (2005) proposed that transactional leadership style was more encouraged than transformational leadership. Transactional leadership was found to have a stronger positive relationship with the level of organizational commitment in comparison with transformational leadership behaviors, in Malaysia (Marmaya, Hitam, Torsiman, & Balakrishnan, 2011). Further, Saetang's (2004) study of scale

development conducted in a Thai educational context revealed that contingency reward was the only significant factor from transactional leadership behaviors in her psychometric test.

Jackson, Meyer, and Wang (2013) did a metaanalysis of leadership, commitment, and culture and found a correlation between contingency reward leadership behavior, a component of transactional leadership style, and affective commitment in power distance societies. They also said that some employees who were from high power distance countries have a lower living standard and less opportunity to improve; thus, adopting contingent reward behavior may encourage employees to want to stay with organizations, as in power distance cultures, where rewards are often allocated in accordance with relationships rather than performance (Fischer & Mansell, 2009).

However, increasing numbers of the new generation who have absorbed western values and who have studied abroad, have been identified as a major influence on Thai leadership style recently (Niffeneggen, Kuviwat, & Engchanil, 2007; Prideaux, 2012). Such change has shown that transformational leadership style has been adopted more frequently than transactional leadership style. Although there is evidence showing that transformational leadership style may be effective in an educational setting (Muijs, Harris, Lumby, Morrison, & Sood, 2006), traditional values and attitudes among Thais still constrain such behaviors; therefore, some behaviors of transactional leadership cannot be ignored. Thus, a combination of transformational leadership and transactional leadership dimensions may maximize effectiveness in educational settings (Pounder, 2001; Silins, 1994). Consequently, it is logical to predict that faculty members in Thai universities will prefer a combination of both leadership styles to enhance their level of organizational commitment.

Methodology and Methods

In this section, we describe the population and data collection techniques, the instrumentation, and the data analyses used.

Population and Data Collection

The chosen university is a private university located in Bangkok, Thailand. It was established in 1987. There are 14 faculties and schools that provide a range of educational fields, including sciences, social sciences, and the arts. The total number of Thai full-time faculty was 362. The university has encountered high turnover rate of its faculty. This could hinder the university from growing.

The population in this study was the 362 Thai full-time faculty from every school who were currently employed, all of whom were sent a survey by campus mail with a statement that completion of the questionnaire would constitute agreement of informed consent. The participants were requested to return a completed questionnaire in a closed envelope to the lead author's personal campus mailbox. We received 344 questionnaires back for a response rate of 95.0%.

The majority of faculty were female (68.3%). The average range of age was 26-35 years old (43%), with almost the same percent in the range of 36-45 years (41.6%). Most had at least a Master's degree (95.4%), while years of working experience in this university was distributed almost equally among the three lower categories (81.4% had 15 or fewer years). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the faculty who participated.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Number	(%)
Gender		
Female	235	68.3
Male	109	31.7
Age		
25 or less	2	0.6
26-35	149	43.3
36-45	143	41.6
46 or more	50	14.5
Educational level		
Bachelor's	16	4.7
Master's	314	91.3
Doctorate	14	4.1
Years of employment		
5 or less	96	27.9
6-10	91	26.5
11-15	93	27.0
16 or more	64	18.6
Total	344	100

Instrumentation

The questionnaire contained three sections--demographic information, leadership styles, and organisational commitment. The items used were validated and tested for reliability. They were both written in Thai, and the items constructed were modified based on Thai educational terminology. Both instruments had been validated in the Thai context (Jitpaichon, 2005; Toomthong, 2005), thereby increasing the probability of establishing reliability and validity in our study.

Leadership styles. The MLQ version developed by Toomthong (2005) was chosen. Participants rated their deans/directors leadership style with a five-point Likert-type scale. (1, "strongly disagree" to 5, "strongly agree"). Forty-seven items

were assessed for transformational leadership style ($\alpha = 0.98$), and twenty-three items for transactional leadership style ($\alpha = 0.89$).

Organizational commitment. This portion of the survey contained 30 items on organizational commitment created by Jitpaichon (2005), based on the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) (Mowday et al., 1979). Participants used five-point Likert scale (1, “strongly disagree” to 5, “strongly agree”) to rate their Identification ($\alpha = 0.86$), Involvement ($\alpha = 0.72$); and Commitment to Stay ($\alpha = 0.80$).

Data Analysis

The alpha level was set at $p < .05$ a priori. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were accomplished by using Pearson product moment correlation coefficients (r). To test for hypothesis 3, stepwise regression analysis was selected, which permitted the software to determine the impact of leadership behaviors of deans/directors on the level of organizational commitment of faculty.

Results

Descriptive statistics are first presented, followed by the tests of Hypotheses 1 and 2 and the test of Hypothesis 3.

Descriptive Statistics

The overall mean value of the leadership behaviors for both transformational leadership and transactional leadership, and organizational commitment level are shown in Table 2.

Correlations

Table 2 also presents the results of the Pearson correlations used to test Hypotheses 1 and 2, which focused on transformational and transactional leadership behaviors and their associations with organizational commitment. Each component of

transformational leadership behaviors was positively related to the level of organizational commitment among faculty. The category that correlated the highest was “idealized influence” ($r = 0.68$), followed by “inspirational motivation” and “intellectual stimulation” with an identical correlation ($r = 0.66$), and “individualized consideration” ($r = 0.65$). The correlation between an aggregate TF behavior and organizational commitment was also positively related ($r = 0.69$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1, a null hypothesis, was rejected.

Hypothesis 2 was to determine the relationship between transactional leadership behavior and the level of organizational commitment. As indicated in Table 2, “contingent reward” and “active-management by exception” behaviors had a positive relationship with organizational commitment among faculty ($r = 0.69$); $r = 0.49$). “Passive-management by exception” behavior was not significantly related to organizational commitment. However, there was a positive correlation between the total score of transactional leadership behavior and the level of organizational commitment among faculty ($r = 0.47$). Thus, Hypothesis 2, also a null hypothesis, was partially supported.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Coefficients

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. ID	3.50	.70	1									
2. IS	3.56	.76	.94**	1								
3. IT	3.45	.77	.91**	.89**	1							
4. IC	3.50	.78	.90**	.89**	.88**	1						
5. CR	3.33	.77	.82**	.83**	.80**	.85**	1					
6. A-MBE	3.35	.53	.63**	.65**	.68**	.63**	.75**	1				
7. P-MBE	2.80	.95	-.20**	-.12*	-.05	-.03	.18**	.25**	1			
8. TFL (Agg.)	3.50	.72	.98**	.97**	.95**	.95**	.86**	.67**	-.12*	1		
9. TSL (Agg.)	3.18	.57	.51**	.56**	.59**	.61**	.83**	.81**	.67**	.58**	1	
10. OC	3.56	.37	.68**	.66**	.66**	.65**	.69**	.49**	-.06	.69**	.47**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

ID	=	Idealized influence	CR	=	Contingent Reward	TFL	=	Transformational leadership
IS	=	Inspirational motivation	A-MBE	=	Active Management by exception	TSL	=	Transactional leadership
IT	=	Intellectual stimulation	P-MBE	=	Passive Management by exception	OC	=	Organizational commitment
IC	=	Individualized consideration						

Stepwise Multiple Regression

Hypothesis 3 was tested through the use of stepwise regression to determine the impact of all behaviors from both transformational and transactional leadership styles on the level of organizational commitment among faculty. The result as presented in Table 3 showing that “contingency reward” had a significant positive effect on the level of organizational commitment and explained 48% of the variance in organizational commitment, followed by “passive management by exception”, adding 4% to the variance explanation and “intellectual stimulation” which added an additional 1%, for a total explanation of variance of 53% in organizational commitment. Moreover, standardized Beta weights were significant ($p < 0.05$) for the

three retained variables as shown in Table 4. Thus, hypothesis 3, a null hypothesis, was rejected as the identified variables were from both transformational and transactional leadership behaviors.

Table 3

Impact of Leadership behaviors on organizational commitment

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	ΔR^2	ΔF	<i>p</i>
1	.69 ^a	.48	.48	.27	.48	314.47	.000
2	.72 ^b	.52	.51	.26	.04	26.70	.000
3	.73 ^c	.53	.53	.26	.01	9.11	.003

a. Predictors: Contingency reward

b. Predictors: Contingency reward, Passive management by exception

c. Predictors: Contingency reward, Passive management by exception, Intellectual stimulation

Table 4

Standardized Beta Weight Coefficients

Model	Standardized Beta	t-value	Sig.
Contingency reward	.69	17.73	.000
Contingency reward	.73	19.02	.000
Passive management by exception	-.20	-5.17	.000
Contingency reward, Passive management by exception	.56	8.21	.000
Passive management by exception Intellectual stimulation	-.16	-3.93	.000
Intellectual stimulation	.20	3.02	.003

Discussion

In higher educational settings, with regard to organizational commitment, few studies have been conducted, especially among faculty in private universities in Thailand. Although the result presented a moderate level of organizational commitment (mean = 3.56), a major problem of high turnover of faculty members in this university has been identified. Amornpipat and McLean (2014) conducted a qualitative study with faculty who worked for this university; they found that some faculty suffered from turnover intention, which would result in a negative impact because those faculty who depart the institution create extra burdens for those who stay as the remaining faculty have to cover for them and follow up on unfinished work, perhaps resulting in a reduction in organizational productivity.

Many faculty working in this university were early in their careers, perhaps resulting in a low level of organizational commitment (Hoekstra, 2011), making it easy for them to leave. They might seek better opportunities by exploring new challenges for their career or further their education at a higher level. However, with the appropriate leadership, these faculty may be willing to put extra effort into their organization throughout their employment because they are committed to their work; however, their intention to remain a member of the organization is crucial for the organization.

Faculty perceived that their deans and directors were more transformational leaders than transactional leaders, although the mean values for both were only moderate. This study also showed a consistent result with other cited research, suggesting a positive relationship between transformational leadership behavior and the level of organizational commitment (Boonyarit et al., 2010; Brown & Moshavi, 2002; Masi & Cooke, 2000). The faculty valued deans and directors who built a

relationship with their faculty based on personal understanding rather than institutional rules, empowered the faculty to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the institution by creating a supportive environment, and acted as a role model with trust from faculty members. As a result, the faculty valued every aspect of transformational leadership behaviors.

Nevertheless, contingency reward and active-management by exception behaviors, two behaviors from the transactional leadership style, were recognised to be positively associated with the faculty's organizational commitment and made the greatest contribution in predicting organizational commitment. This specific outcome might be explained as transactional leadership behaviors can not be ignored when the university would like to enhance the organizational commitment level of faculty. As suggested earlier, the culture impacts the preferred leadership of followers (Selvarajah et al., 2013). Thailand is regarded as a high power distance country and has a bureaucratic working system in university settings (Brondy, 2009). This type of organizational structure encourages the adoption of transactional leadership style (Brazier, 2005). In this study, contingency reward behavior had the highest subscale correlation among other behaviors with organizational commitment; this result offers confirmation to a recent meta-analysis of leadership, commitment, and culture, which showed that contingency reward behavior was positively related to a high power distance culture (Jackson et al., 2013). Consequently, the present findings indicate that, in this university, with a hierarchical organizational culture and complex working structures, transactional leadership, at least with contingency reward, may be most likely to result in a higher organizational commitment. .

Moreover, Fisher et al. (2007) found that individuals in high power distance societies favoured equity-based reward practices; thus, adopting a contingency reward leadership behavior may encourage the faculty of this university to want to remain with their university

longer, as some of faculty have perceived that they have received an unfair compensation package from this university (Amornpipat & McLean, 2014).

The findings of the present study suggest that deans and directors of this university may consider adopting a contingency reward leadership behavior in order to reduce any experience of unfair reward practices, subsequently, affecting an increase in the level of organizational commitment. However, in university settings, deans and directors often have limited ability to reward and promote faculty members. Such practices are generally approved by the upper level of administration (Brown & Moshavi, 2002), who may be reluctant to institute such a system. Thus, deans and directors may have little power to reward their faculty; thus, the ability to provide adequate rewards for the faculty should be supported by the higher management of the university. Further study in examining leadership style of university leaders at a higher level of administration may be recommended.

Passive management by exception leadership and Intellectual stimulation behaviors of deans and directors also showed an impact on the level of organizational commitment, perhaps because of the nature of the work (Pounder, 2001). Birnbaum (1992) stated that a major expectation by university faculty was autonomy. There is a likelihood that the faculty in this study expected self-management in their research and teaching efforts, but also expected their deans and directors to encourage them to try new approaches and encourage them to use their own imagination and thoughts when they work. The faculty members might only desire their leader to intervene when things go wrong.

Recommendations for Practice

The present findings can be used to develop a strategy for leadership development training programs only within this specific university, while other universities, especially in Thailand, might consider whether these findings might be relevant for them. Communication about reward systems, among parties, including top management, deans and directors, and

faculty, could be a key process to develop good working relationships within this university (Bland et al., 2005). A clear communication about rewards and autonomy between faculty and deans/directors is highly suggested for this university. This action may inspire faculty to exert extra effort and ultimately stay with the university.

Recommendations for Future Research

As this study was conducted within only one private university, therefore, collecting more data from different private universities in Thailand should be investigated to confirm or reject the present findings and enhance generalizability. Further, developing scales to measure appropriate academic leadership styles that are more indigenous to Thailand, and particularly in Thai higher education, may provide more reliable results, which could be helpful for implementing leadership development across Thai universities.

There are also different types of organizational commitment. Future research might benefit by exploring the particular types of organizational development that are affected by various leadership styles in Thai private higher education.

Finally, similar research might be conducted in other countries, especially those involved in the emerging ASEAN context, to determine the influence of leadership style on organizational commitment in those cultural contexts.

Conclusion

This study supported the positive association between all transformational leadership behaviors and the level of organizational commitment, while contingency rewards and active management by exception behaviors from transactional leadership style were significantly correlated with organizational commitment. Interestingly, however, passive management by exception behaviors contributed second most to explaining the variance in organizational commitment. The influence of Thai leaders in higher educational context may be based on cultural aspects, especially being a high power distance country. These leadership behaviors

shed light on an important aspect of the interaction between all functions within the university and importantly the roles of the deans and directors as they influence the Thai faculty's level of commitment to the university.

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