



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**EFFECT OF EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTION TOWARDS LEADER
BEHAVIOURS ON EMPLOYEE AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT**

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Statement of Originality

The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled
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EMPLOYEE AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT**

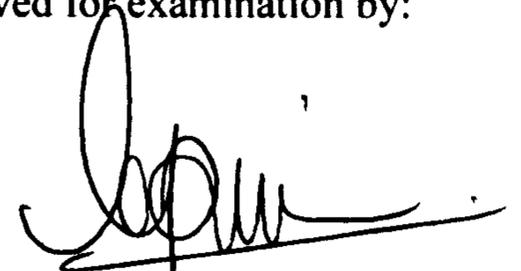
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ABSTRACT

EFFECT OF EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTION TOWARDS LEADER BEHAVIOURS ON EMPLOYEE AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT

Catherine Wang Siew Yin

The purpose of the present study was to examine how employee affective commitment is related to specific leader behaviours namely relations-, tasks- and change-oriented behaviours. This study also sought to determine the extent to which level of affective commitment differs in terms of gender, age, years of service, job level and academic achievement. The sample of respondents participated in this study consisted of employees from four organizations from the private sector and a public secondary school located in the state of Penang. Questionnaires were completed and returned by 153 out of 200 employees asked to complete questionnaires, yielding 77 percent response rate. Statistical techniques such as independent sample t-test, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis were used to analyze data collected. The inferential analysis of data results demonstrated that seven alternate hypotheses were accepted. There was a significant difference in the level of employee affective commitment based on age, years of service and job level. It was also found that all three dimensions of leader behaviours were significantly related to employee affective commitment. The multiple regression analysis showed that relations-oriented behaviours have the greatest influence on affective commitment. This study has provided some insights and implications to organizations and practitioners involved in daily interactions with employees or subordinates. Managers and supervisors will gain some insights about the importance of recognizing their leadership behaviours so that employees will perceive that their supervisors are treating them with respect. As organizations are becoming increasingly unstable and susceptible to impending changes, leaders should make use of the findings yielded from this study to guide their leadership behaviour in order to keep employees continuously committed to their work and organization.

ABSTRAK

PENGARUH PERSEPSI PEKERJA TERHADAP PERILAKU PEMIMPIN KE ATAS KOMITMEN AFEKTIF PEKERJA

Catherine Wang Siew Yin

Tujuan kajian ini dijalankan adalah untuk menyelidik bagaimana komitmen afektif pekerja berhubung kait dengan dengan perilaku pemimpin tertentu seperti perilaku ala-perhubungan, - tugas dan -perubahan. Penyelidikan ini juga berhasrat untuk menentukan sejauh mana tahap afektif komitmen berbeza berdasarkan terma-terma seperti jantina, umur, tempoh khidmat, tahap jawatan dan pencapaian akademik. Sampel responden yang terlibat dalam penyelidikan ini terdiri daripada pekerja dari empat buah organisasi daripada sektor swasta dan sebuah sekolah menengah awam yang terletak di Pulau Pinang. Borang kajian selidik telah dijawab dan dikembalikan oleh 153 daripada 200 pekerja yang mengambil bahagian dalam penyelidikan ini, memberikan kadar respons sebanyak 77 peratus. Kaedah statistik seperti "independent sample t-test", "One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)", analisis korelasi Pearson and regresi berganda telah digunakan untuk menganalisa data-data yang dikumpulkan. Keputusan analisis telah menunjukkan bahawa tujuh hipotesis kajian telah diterima. Daripada analisis, terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan di antara tahap komitmen afektif pekerja berdasarkan umur, tempoh khidmat, dan tahap jawatan. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan hubungan yang signifikan wujud antara ketiga-tiga dimensi perilaku pemimpin dengan komitmen afektif pekerja. Analisis regresi berganda menunjukkan perilaku ala-perhubungan mempunyai pengaruh terbesar ke atas komitmen afektif. Penyelidikan ini telah memperjelaskan keadaan serta implikasi kepada organisasi-organisasi dan pemimpin-pemimpin yang terlibat dalam interaksi harian dengan para pekerja atau pekerja bawahan. Pengurus serta penyelia boleh mendapat satu gambaran yang jelas tentang kepentingan mengenal pasti perilaku kepimpinan mereka supaya para pekerja akan menyimpulkan bahawa penyelia mereka melayan mereka dengan hormat. Sebagaimana organisasi menjadi semakin tidak stabil serta menerima hambatan perubahan, para pemimpin boleh menggunakan hasil penyelidikan ini sebagai panduan untuk memandu perilaku kepimpinan mereka supaya berupaya memastikan para pekerja senantiasa berkomited kepada kerja dan organisasi mereka.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the background of study, problem statement, research objectives generally and specifically, research hypotheses, conceptual framework, significance of study, definition of terms and the scope of study.

1.1 Background of Study

The nature of effective leadership is intertwined with reactions from followers. Previous researchers have measured followers' reactions in terms of work motivation, job satisfaction, work performance, work emotions, commitment (Lee, 2005) and others. In the past, traditional

leadership studies were mainly confined to leaders' personality and traits and its relation with the styles of leadership (O'Rawe, 2006). Scholars were more interested in examining who is the leader and what ideal qualities a leader constitutes. However during the late 1940s, leadership researchers began to emphasize their focus on the behaviours that the leaders engage in (Pierce and Newstrom, 2003). Numerous studies were conducted to seek an understanding of what leaders actually do to be effective. This field of study was soon popularized with the term *behavioural leadership* which refers to the study of actions and behaviours that define a leadership style. It has been suggested that leader behaviours have an impact on follower attitudes, motivation, and work-related behaviours (Pierce and Newstrom, 2003). Bowers and Seashore (1966) defined leadership as "organizationally useful behaviour by one member of an organizational family toward another member or members of that same organizational family". By this definition, leadership consists of a large collective of separate behaviours by which they may be categorized in a great variety of ways.

The interpersonal interaction between leaders and employees continue to impact greatly on employees' work behaviour and has been suggested that it be brought to the next level of integration by shifting emphases on the cognitions, attributes, behaviours and context which govern the interaction between both sides (Avolio, 2007). Avolio (2007) has established a deeper understanding of leadership strategies by bringing it to the next level in which he examined how each and every action or reaction of leaders and employees is filtered by cognitive categorization schemes or systems. Essentially, this shift of emphases has prompted leadership researchers to take into consideration the role of employees' perception towards their leaders. Specifically, perception has been defined as "the process by which we receive

information through our five senses and assign meaning to it” (Wells *et al.*, 1995 as cited in Dickmann and Stanford-Blair, 2002). By this definition and in terms of this study, employee’s perception can be described as the process by which they observe their leader’s behaviours and assign meaning to it. On a similar note, perception is influenced by the meanings assigned from the behaviours. A study was carried out previously but with a different set of variables. Tests were conducted to illustrate how “employees’ reactions to their supervisors’ influence tactics are governed by meanings inferred from the tactics” (Michela, 2007). Therefore, how employees assign meanings to their leaders’ behaviours have an effect on their commitment.

As organizations become increasingly unstable and susceptible to impending changes, employees’ commitment towards their employing organizations are becoming difficult to cultivate (Foote, Seipel, Johnson, and Duffy, 2005). Due to restructuring and flattening of organizations, mergers and acquisitions, employees are finding it hard to develop their commitment in depth (Foote, Seipel, Johnson, and Duffy, 2005). In the last two decades of researches, commitment has served as an antecedent and a consequence of any work-related variable. Mathieu and Zajac (1990) have presented a study using organizational commitment as an antecedent of performance, turnover and absenteeism and as consequences of personal variables, work environment variables and role states. The link between organizational commitment and leadership is evidenced in many previous works (see Savery, 1994; Lok and Crawford, 1999; Sanders and Schyns, 2006; Jong and Hartog, 2007 and Michela, 2007).

Employee commitment to their organization and more specifically to their immediate leaders is believed to depend on perceptions that employees make regarding the nature of their

relationship with their leaders (Michela, 2007). This study seeks to demonstrate the underlying process that forms these reactions. In order to generate positive reactions from employees, leaders should first understand the construction of employee's perception and how it influences work behaviour. More specifically, this study aims to demonstrate the effect of employee's perception towards their leaders' behaviours on the states of affective commitment.

1.2 Statement of Problem

In order to achieve significant levels of affective commitment, employees need to possess a positive perception towards their leaders' behaviour (Michela, 2007). In his study, Michela (2007) concluded that questions remain about the dimensionality of perceptions and meanings of leaders' influence tactics. He added that other relevant behavioural domains have yet to be studied. From the theoretical perspective, Pierce and Newstrom (2003) described the inability of traditional leadership theories in explaining the 'totality' of leadership. They said the effectiveness of leadership cannot be comprehensively explained by merely employing styles leaders execute during leadership situations. In addition, leaders are more likely unaware of the type of behaviour that they employ during a social influence process, which causes employees to assign negative meanings to the behaviour (Dickmann and Stanford-Blair, 2002). As a result, employees lessen their commitment towards their leader and organization and at the same time these changes will impact on other work-related variables. This study seeks to demonstrate how employee's perception of their leader's behaviour is governed by meanings assigned to the behaviour and upon the implications of the meanings.

1.3 Research Questions

Ralph Stogdill (1948 cited in Bass, 1990) once wrote leadership is a *relationship*. Basically, leader-follower relationship is the cornerstone of any organization by which the quality of such relationship impacts on areas of employee behaviour and attitudes, group effectiveness, as well as the overall organizational performance (Pierce and Newstrom, 2003). This study addresses the role of the follower or employee in the leadership process. This study will try to find answers to the following general research questions:

- 1. To what extent does employees' level of affective commitment differ in terms of gender, age, years of service, job level and academic achievement?**
- 2. Is there any relationship between relations-oriented behaviours and employee affective commitment?**
- 3. Is there any relationship between tasks-oriented behaviours and employee affective commitment?**
- 4. Is there any relationship between change-oriented behaviours and employee affective commitment? and**
- 5. Which of the leader behaviours is significantly related to employee affective commitment?**

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 General Objective

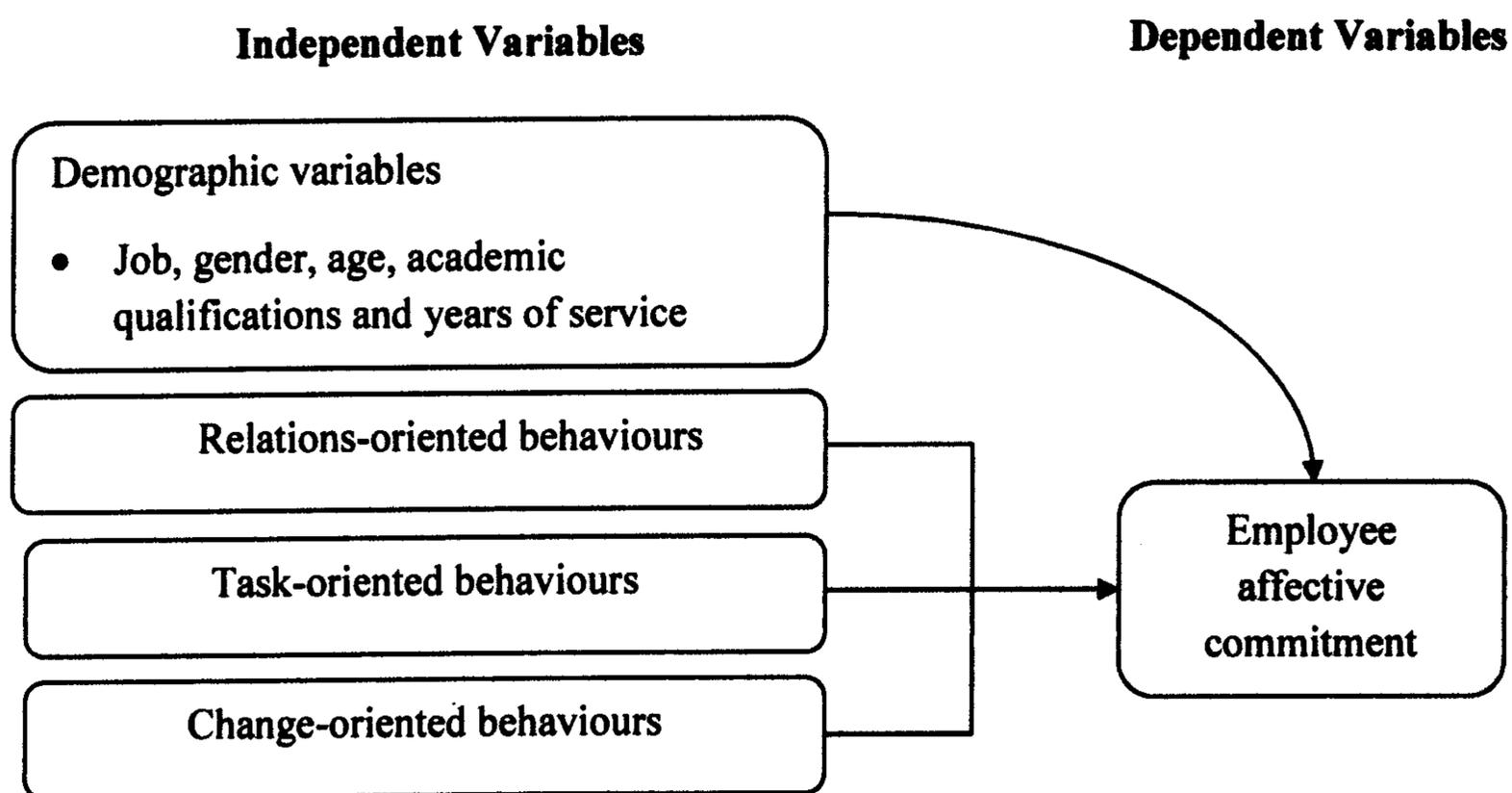
The main objective of this study is to examine how employees' affective commitment is related to specific leader behaviours.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

The following are the study's specific objectives:

1. To determine the extent to which employees' level of affective commitment differ in terms of gender, age, years of service, job level and academic achievement.
2. To determine whether there is a relationship between relations-oriented behaviours with employees' affective commitment.
3. To determine whether there is a relationship between task-oriented behaviours with employees' affective commitment.
4. To determine whether there is a relationship between change oriented behaviours with employees' affective commitment.
5. To identify which leader behaviour is significantly related to employees' affective commitment.

1.5 Conceptual Framework



Leader behaviours were adopted from the Yukl, O'Donnell and Taber's (2009) study

Figure 1.0: Conceptual Framework

The framework above is used to determine whether there is a relationship between the types of leader behaviours and employee affective commitment.

Leader behaviours are the independent variables in this study. They consist of three dimensions of leader behaviours adopted from the study conducted by Yukl et al. (2009) which are relations-, task- and change-oriented behaviour. Each behaviour dimension is made up of various specific leader behaviours that are *supporting, recognizing, developing, consulting, delegating* grouped under relations-oriented behaviours; *clarifying, short-term planning, monitoring operations* under task-oriented behaviours and *leading by example, envisioning*

change under change-oriented behaviours. Each of this behaviour was tested against employee affective commitment.

1.6 Research Hypotheses

Gender differences in studies of leadership have always attracted escalating interest. Chow (2005) has empirically explored how female and male managers describe their perceived leadership qualities in an Asian context. The results yielded demonstrated that female managers anticipated a more favourable image of leaders than their male counterparts:

Ha1. There is a significant difference in the level of employee affective commitment based on gender.

It is normal that the perception of each leader differs due to human factors (Akdemir, Kasimoglu and Ekmekci, 2009). The perceptual functioning should change with the perceiver's age due to maturation and learning (Dember, Epstein and West, 2009). Accordingly, younger employees may perceive their leaders differently than their older colleagues. Thus the following hypothesis is made:

Ha2. There is a significant difference in the level of employee affective commitment based on age.