

# **LEADERSHIP STYLES OF FEMALE ACADEMICIANS IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper is a preliminary study on the leadership styles of female academicians in Malaysia's public universities. Over the years, leadership styles have been studied extensively in various contexts, with different theoretical foundations. Leaders have been traditionally seen in many cultures as those who have benefited from their heritage, but current theorists and researchers view leadership as learned behaviours. The growing impact of women in the workforce has kept the leadership style of women on the research agenda. This study adopted the leadership style model by Bass and Avolio. Respondents were given a set of questionnaires from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to identify their leadership styles. The questionnaires contained 18 questions based on Bass and Avolio's Multifactor Questionnaire. Preliminarily, 200 academicians were chosen from 20 public universities in Malaysia. Apart from determining the leadership styles of these academicians, the study also tried to search for any distinct relationship (if any) between gender and leadership styles. It was found that the leadership styles of these academicians are more towards transactional leadership or task-oriented. Transactional Leadership is based on bureaucratic authority and legitimacy within the organisation. Transactional leaders emphasise work standards, assignments, and task-oriented goals. They also tend to focus on task completion and employee compliance and rely quite heavily on organisational rewards and punishments to influence employee performance. In contrast, Transformational Leadership is a process that motivates followers by appealing to higher ideals and moral values. Transformational leaders must be able to define and articulate a vision for their organisations, and the followers must accept the credibility of the leader. The findings showed that a higher percentage of female academicians are transactional leaders. This means that they are more task-oriented rather than people-oriented.

**Keywords:** *Female Academicians, Leadership Styles, Public Universities, Transactional Leadership, Transformational Leadership*

## **1. Introduction**

Over the years, leadership styles have been studied extensively in various contexts, with different theoretical foundations. Leaders have been traditionally seen in many cultures as those who have benefited from their heritage, but current theorists and researchers view leadership as learned behaviours (Bernard, 1926; Blake, Shepard, Mouton, 1964; Fiedler, 1967; House & Mitchell, 1974).

Most studies of leadership focus on how a person identified as a leader is behaving or interacting with a group of subordinates. In some cases, this group of subordinates is so large that it comprises an entire organisation, and in this way, a few studies have looked at the leader's influence on organisational performance.

In recent years, many authors have proposed a distinction between managers who rely on their formal position and work mostly with bureaucratic processes, such as planning, budgeting, organising, and controlling, and leaders who rely on their abilities, visions, agendas, and coalition building and who mainly affect people's feelings and thinking by non-coercive means (Kotter, 1985; Zaleznik, 1989). If

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we look at the two definitions of management and leadership close together by Judge and Robbins (2004), who stated that,

*Management can get things done through others by the traditional activities of planning, organising, monitoring, and controlling-without worrying too much about what goes on inside people's head. Leadership, by contrast, is vitally concerned with what people are thinking and feeling and how they are to be linked to the environment, to the entity and the job/task.*

Leadership is, therefore, not seen as standing above but rather as trying to influence people's minds. While there are many leadership theories, two that have dominated the literature since the 1980s are Transformational Leadership and Transactional Leadership.

Burns (1978) was one of the first to provide an explicit definition of Transformational Leadership. He proposed that the leadership process occurs in one of two ways, either transactional or transformational. Transactional Leadership is based on bureaucratic authority and legitimacy within the organisation. Transactional leaders emphasise work standards, assignments, and task-oriented goals. They also tend to focus on task completion and employee compliance and rely quite heavily on organisational rewards and punishments to influence employee performance.

In contrast, Burns (1978) characterised Transformational Leadership as a process that motivates followers by appealing to higher ideals and moral values. Transformational leaders must be able to define and articulate a vision for their organisations, and the followers must accept the credibility of the leader. More recently, Bass and Avolio (1994) have developed a theory of Transformational Leadership that is a culmination and extension of earlier work by Bennis (1985), Burns (1978), and others.

Bass and Avolio (1994) proposed that Transformational Leadership comprises of four dimensions. The first dimension is idealised influence. Idealised influence is described as the behaviour that results in followers' admiration, respect, and trust. Idealised influence involves risk sharing on the part of leaders, a consideration of follower needs over personal needs, and ethical and moral conduct. The second dimension is inspirational motivation. This dimension is reflected in behaviour that provides meaning and challenge to followers' work. It includes behaviours that articulate clear expectations demonstrating commitment to overall organisational goals. In addition, team spirit is aroused through enthusiasm and optimism. The third dimension is intellectual stimulation. Leaders who demonstrate this type of Transformational Leadership solicit new ideas and creative problem solutions from their followers, and encourage new approaches to job performance. The fourth dimension is individualised consideration. This is reflected by leaders who listen attentively and pay special attention to their followers' achievements and growth needs.

Although the research on Transformational Leadership is relatively new, there is some empirical support for the validity of Bass and Avolio's Transformational Leadership model. Using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), Bass and Avolio have found significant relationships across a number of settings between a subordinate's ratings of leader effectiveness and satisfaction with their leaders who are using transformational methods. In addition, there is some evidence that Transformational Leadership is significantly related to other relevant outcome variables, such as follower's perceptions of role clarity, mission clarity, and openness of communication (Hinkin & Tracey, 1994).

Bass (1990) defines Transformational Leadership as:

- a) Idealised influence (attributed and behaviour): inspirational motivation: communicate high expectations, uses symbols to focus efforts, expresses mission and sense of mission, and instils pride, gain respect and trust
- b) provides important purposes in simple ways,
- c) Intellectual stimulation: promotes intelligence, rationality, and careful problem solving,

- d) Individualised consideration: gives personal attention, treats each employee individually, coaches, advises.

Bass (1990) defines Transactional Leadership as:

- a) Contingent reward: contracts exchange of rewards for effort, promises rewards for good performance, recognises accomplishments,
- b) management-by-exception (active): watches and searches by deviations from rules and standard, takes corrective actions
- c) Management by exception (passive): intervenes only if standards are not met.

### ***1.1. Problem Statement***

The model of Transformational Leadership includes a continuum of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire forms of leadership. Each form characterises aspects of the dynamic process of interaction between leader and follower and also identifies certain patterns and features to distinguish transformational leadership from transactional and laissez-faire styles (Avolio, 1999). The transformational leader pays particular attention to others' needs, which, in turn, increases followers' levels of motivation (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1998). Furthermore, a leader of this type encourages others to reach their full potential while also adopting strong ethical characteristics. Meanwhile, transactional leaders approach followers intending to exchange one thing for another (Burns, 1978) with the use of either reward or punishment contingent on the followers' completion or non-completion of assigned tasks. Laissez-faire leadership involves indifference and avoidance. A leader with this profile will "avoid making decisions, abdicate responsibilities, divert attention from hard choices, and will talk about getting down to work, but never really does" (Bass, 1998). Hence, using Bass and Avolio's Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), this study aims to measure the intensity or the depth of transformational and transactional leadership style among female academicians in Malaysian public universities. Apart from that, the researcher also analyse how the leadership styles affect the female academicians' way of coping with the demands of their career in academic fields and building an interpersonal relationship with their peers and whether or not they are affected by their gender.

### ***1.2. Objectives of Study***

The main objectives of this study are:

- a) To identify the leadership styles of female academicians using Bass and Avolio's Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ).
- b) To determine whether gender affects leadership styles of female academicians in Malaysian public universities

### ***1.3. Significance of Study***

There are certain basic qualities or characteristics that most people associate with leadership. Some of these include self-reliant, independent, assertive, risk-taker, dominant, ambitious, and self-sufficient. Most people would agree that people who possess these attributes are often labelled as "leaders". Effective leadership can be categorised in the following way. An effective leader is someone who motivates a person or a group to accomplish more than they would have otherwise accomplished without that leader's involvement. We can relate this to the academic world of a lecturer who teaches students coming from various walks of life with different family and educational backgrounds and ethnicity. For example, UiTM students are mainly Bumiputeras, who are mostly the Malays, including those of mixed Chinese and Indian parentage. In Sabah and Sarawak, the Bumiputeras include all the indigenous groups, such as Kadazan and Bidayuh. These students of various backgrounds need a different approach to motivation and coaching, which suits the norms that they have adopted since childhood. Hence, this demands the lecturer in such a way as to motivate these students towards adapting to the new ways of getting educated.

After researching many references on this topic, and reading many of the empirical data available, on leadership and gender, one is left with the opinion that there is still ample opportunity for research in this area.

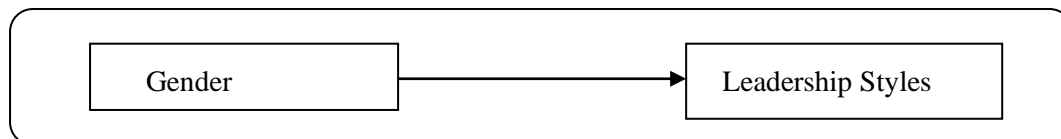
#### **1.4. Limitation of Study**

This paper does not intend to be an all-encompassing review of leadership and gender issues among female academicians in Malaysian public universities. It merely serves to bring to the fore some recent findings and some current articles concerning this topic as food for thought. The goal of this paper is to stimulate the thinking of the readers concerning leadership styles where female academicians are concerned.

#### **1.5. Scope of Study**

This study measures the leadership styles of 200 academicians comprising 100 male lecturers and 100 female lecturers. The leadership styles are measured based on Bass and Avolio's Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The age of the respondents is set as a controlled variable by selecting respondents basically at the same range of age limits that is between the late 30s to early 40s. This is because age is not the factor or variable studied here.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**



## **3. Research Questions**

This study tends to find the answers to these research questions:

- a) What are the leadership styles of the majority of female academicians in Malaysian public universities?
- b) Does gender affect or determines the difference in the leadership styles of these academicians?

## **4. Literature Review**

A study by Obiwuru et al. (2011) found that leadership has been recognised as an important focus in organisational behaviour perspective, which is one of the vibrant effects among individual and organisational interactions. This statement has been supported by Khan et al. (2012) who justified that leadership definitely has a vital role in determining that all identified leadership styles have variable outcomes under different situations.

Another study by Boseman (2008) showed that the transactional style of leadership leads to successful activities by organisations, even though this style of leadership does not empower the followers as much as compared to transformational leadership. However, it does give the followers more sense of identity and job satisfaction during their tasks. A study by Boemer (2007) suggested that transformational leadership has a significant role to play in an organisation regarding followers' performance and creativity as compared to transactional leadership.

According to Shamsudin Wahab et al. (2016), the relationship between leadership styles and performance has been discussed comprehensively by many scholars. Most of the previous research indicated that leadership styles have a significant relationship with the organisational performance.

Wang, Shieh, and Tang (2010) stated that different styles of leadership can determine the relationship between the leadership styles and the organisational performance, whether it may have positive or negative correlation.

The literature review on transformational leadership style that has fundamentally been developed by Bass (1985), who extended the work of Burns (1978), explained that transformational, as well as transactional leadership styles, has been motivated by the psychological mechanisms. Bass (1985) added to the initial concepts of Burns (1978) to help in explaining how transformational leadership could be measured as well as how it impacts the followers' motivation toward the performance. The extension of Burns' (1978) concept of transformational leadership style by Bass (1985) suggested that a transformational leader is measured first based on his or her influence on the followers. The followers experience trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect for the transformational leader and because of the qualities of the leader, they are willing to work harder than originally expected.

Another study on transformational theory by Shamsudin Wahab et al. (2016) suggested that an effective leader is able to develop and encourage an appropriate idea or image of the organisations. From this study, it indicates that effective leaders focus more on objectives and visions who want to achieve their desired intentions to be fulfilled toward organisational performance. In relation to that, the transformational leadership in education perspective is more likely to sustain the educational system change, as stated by Bryman (2007). Regarding the leadership style in the education system, most academic leaders preferred transformational leadership, as mentioned by Lustik (2008). According to Obiwuru et al. (2011), transformational leaders have motivated their followers to be entirely aware in terms of the importance of their task outcomes and encourage them to challenge their self-interest for the sake of the organisations in achieving their higher needs. Significantly, one of the main elements of the transformational leadership style is based on its fundamentals, which develops both leaders and the followers, as stated by Thrash (2009). Meanwhile, Avolio (2007) supported that transformational leadership is morally inspiring, a quality that differentiates it from other leadership styles. In conclusion, this transformational leadership theory indicated that the leaders must have the capability to respond to the demands in any situations while managing the followers in any organisations (Northouse, 2007).

Referring to a study by Paracha et al. (2012), the transactional leadership style literally means "exchange" whereby this transaction leadership has to deal with the exchange between the leader and his or her followers. In other words, transactional leadership is based on the expected reward in return that will be received by the followers due to their determinations, productivity, and trustworthiness, as supported by Bass and Riggio (2006). Besides that, the role of transactional leaders is to ensure that followers clearly understand the goal of accomplishment, overcome potential barriers within an organisation, and also motivate them in achieving the predetermined goals in the best way possible. According to a study by Obiwuru et al. (2011), transactional leadership represented both constructive and corrective behaviour. Constructive behaviour refers to contingent rewards and corrective measurements that determined management by exceptions. Meanwhile, contingent rewards involve the clarifications of the work required to achieve rewards and the use of the incentives and contingent rewards to employ the influence.

In another perspective of literature, according to Xiao (2015), gender differences in leadership positions around the world also had a difference in leadership styles. As mentioned by Xiao (2015), many studies have discovered that leadership styles adopted by men and women tend to vary largely, hence affecting the overall performance of an organisation. As a result, it showed that it is a very interesting topic as organisations with more female representation in top management tend to differ from organisations with low female representation in top management. This problem statement has provided a rationale for conducting a study on how gender differences in leadership impact organisational performance as stated by Xiao (2015).

A study by McKinsey & Company (2007) discovered that organisations that had a larger percentage of women in their top leadership and management positions tend to experience greater positive

impacts on financial performance, as well as organisational excellence. Another study undertaken by London Business School, 2007 (cited in OECD, 2009) found that an increase in women's representation in managerial teams boosted the innovation capacity of the companies as well. This scenario has been supported by a study by Joy (2008) that examined how women impacted the corporate boards in Fortune 500 companies. According to Joy (2008), the findings showed that organisations that had management involving a greater percentage of women were able to outperform financially compared to the ones that had a low representation of females in their management. Joy (2008) also discovered that the increasing number of women on corporate boards is significant for both financial performance and gender diversity in corporate officer positions. With the differences in leadership outcomes, it becomes vital to investigate how men and women differ in their leadership behaviour and approach as a problem statement in conducting this study.

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1. Data Collection**

Respondents were chosen through convenience sampling where the questionnaires were distributed via email to all public universities. Two hundred selected lecturers from campuses all over Malaysia responded by replying to the email. The questionnaires contained 18 questions based on Bass and Avolio's Multifactor Questionnaire. The data collection procedure took 3 weeks.

### **5.2. Procedure for Data Analysis**

This study was a descriptive study and data was analysed using SPSS. Methods used to analyse the data were based on descriptive statistics and also using Spearman's Correlation and Pearson's  $r$ .

## **6. Findings and Analysis**

It was found that, from the total respondents, 86.7% are married and 13.3% are single. Out of the married respondents, 23.1% show the transformational leadership style, while 53.8% are transactional leaders. As for lecturers who are single, or not married, 100% show more of a transformational leadership style. It can also be concluded from the table that, out of the total respondents having a transformational leadership style, 60% are married and 40% are single.

A total of 100% of respondents aged between 34 years old and less have a transformational leadership style, 62.5% from lecturers aged between 35-39 years old are transformational leaders, 50% are transactional leaders for lecturers between 40-44 years old, and 75.5% lecturers aged 45 years and more are transactional leaders.

100% of respondents having a Bachelor's Degree (DM41) are transformational leaders, 47.6% of lecturers having a Master's Degree are transactional leaders, and 80% of lecturers with a Ph.D. or DBA qualifications are also transactional leaders.

The result showed that 87.5% of lecturers of 1-5 working experience are more transformational in their leadership styles compared to those who are 6-10 years' experience who are more transactional (44.4%). As they gain more experience, they become more and more transactional leaders, whereby 75% of those having working experience between 21-30 years show a transactional leadership style.

**Table 1: Leadership Styles by Gender**

		Leadership			
		Transformational	Transactional	Both	Total
<b>Male</b>	% within gender	40.0	33.0	26.7	100.00
	% within leadership style	60.0	35.7	66.7	50.0
	% of total	20.0	16.0	13.3	50.0
<b>Female</b>	% within gender	26.7	60.0	13.3	100.00
	% within leadership style	40.0	64.3	33.3	50.0
	% of total	13.3	30.0	6.7	50.0
<b>Total</b>	% within gender	33.3	46.7	20.0	100.00
	% within leadership style	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	% of total	33.3	46.7	20.0	100.0

The result showed that 40% of male lecturers are transformational leaders and 60% of female lecturers are more inclined towards the transactional leadership style. There are also quite a large percentage of both genders showing both leadership styles whereby, 26.7% of male lecturers and 13.3% of female lecturers have both transformational and transactional leadership styles.

The second research question explores the relations between gender and leadership styles of female academicians. The answer can be extracted from the simple correlation coefficient run. The simple correlation coefficient is a statistical measure of the covariation, or association, between two variables (Zikmund, 2003).

The correlation coefficient  $r$  ranges from +1.0 to -1.0. If the value of  $r$  is 1.0, there is a perfect positive linear (straight line) relationship. If the value of  $r$  is -1.0, there is a perfect negative linear relationship or a perfect inverse relationship. No correlation is indicated if  $r=0$ . A correlation coefficient indicates both the magnitude of the linear relationship and the direction of the relationship.

The table below shows the values given by Pearson's  $R$  and also Spearman Correlation. The values in the table show that Pearson's  $R$  is equal to zero and the Spearman correlation is 0.017. From the values given, we can conclude that there is no correlation between gender and leadership styles of academicians.

**Table 2: Leadership Styles and Gender = No Relationship**

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error (a)	Approx. T (b)	Approx. Sig. (c)
<b>Interval by Interval</b>	<b>Pearson's R</b>	.000	.183	.000	1.000(c)
<b>Ordinal by Ordinal</b>	<b>Spearman Correlation</b>	.017	.187	.088	.930(c)
<b>N of Valid Case</b>		200			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

## 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 7.1. Conclusions

From the data analysis, we can see that 46.7% of academicians are adapting the transactional leadership style, while 33.3% are transformational leaders. This means that they are more task-oriented rather than people-oriented. These findings match the demand and the nature of their job, whereby targets and strategies exercised in obtaining their teaching and coaching objectives have to run parallel in order to have students graduating with a good grade or CGPA. In terms of the relationship between gender and leadership styles, the finding is supported by Bass (1998). This means that the leadership styles of the lecturers in public universities in Malaysia are not determined by the gender of the lecturers.

## 7.2. Recommendations

### 7.2.1. To Other Researchers

The research carried out might have a greater significance if a larger sample is used. Apart from using gender and leadership styles as variables, studies could also focus on other means of measurement such as cultural aspects of leadership, or by using other instruments, such as the Least Preferred Co-worker questionnaire by Fiedler, to produce interesting findings. Does leadership affect students' outcomes? This is a critical question. Does educational leadership make a difference in student's success? Much of the research into educational leadership has focused on the impact of leadership on student outcomes and/or college effectiveness in a more general sense. There are no recent studies on the impact of leadership on student outcomes in higher education done in Malaysia. I suggest that further research is conducted in this area.

### 7.2.2. To the Lecturers

Based on the study conducted, the leadership styles determined are more of transactional leadership. Transactional leaders are more focused on task and contingent reinforcement or contingent reward. In other words, the leaders' rewards to followers are contingent on their achieving specified performance levels. These positive characteristics are quite relevant for a university scenario, whereby students are rewarded when they have performed well, or achieved a certain target. In fact, what I am suggesting is that lecturers should be adopting both leadership styles accordingly. The reason for this is, transformational leadership is also useful in providing vision, and a sense of mission, instils pride, gains respect, trust, and increases optimism. Such a lecturer would excite and inspires the student. The leader (lecturer) acts as a model for subordinates, communicates a vision, and uses symbols to focus efforts. For the transformational leadership style, the lecturer coaches and mentors, provides continuous feedback and links organisational mentors' needs to the organisation's mission. Hence, the objective of the university will be captured and at the same time, this will satisfy the needs of the students.

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