

Exploring Affiliative Leadership Among Department Heads in Sabah, Malaysia: Impact on Lecturers' Organizational Commitment

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine lecturers' perceptions of affiliative leadership and its impact on perceived organizational commitment in Sabah, Malaysia. The sample comprised 56 lecturers from three private higher educational institutions (PHEIs) in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, who responded to two structured questionnaires on Google Forms. Data were analyzed by using SPSS 29.0. Results showed that only a low number of lecturers tend to perceive their department heads as affiliative (48.3 to 64.3 percent); besides, only low percentages (42.9 to 58.5 percent) of them tend to demonstrate organizational commitment. On the other hand, nonparametric tests showed that there were no significant differences by way of gender, age, and job experience in affiliative leadership and perceived organizational commitment. Additionally, Wilcoxon signed rank test based on a hypothesized value of 3.5 showed that all items related to affiliative leadership were significant at $p < 0.001$, having medians that were significantly different from the test value, and were likely to indicate strong disagreement. Although levels of affiliative leadership and organizational commitment tend to be low, both appear to be significantly and positively related. In light of the findings, some recommendations were made to enhance the levels of both variables within the context of PHEIs in Sabah, Malaysia.

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Contribution/Originality: This research offers a valuable contribution by examining lecturers' perceptions of affiliative leadership and its impact on perceived

organizational commitment in Sabah, Malaysia. Besides narrowing the gap that exists in the educational leadership literature, it is the first quantitative study that examines lecturers' perceptions of an emerging leadership style in Sabah, Malaysia. Therefore, it adds to the very limited evidence base on the practice of affiliative leadership at private higher educational institutions and reports a novel conceptual framework of factors associated with affiliative leadership in relation to organizational commitment.

1. Introduction

Coined by [Goleman \(2003\)](#), affiliative leadership has several attributes that have increased its adoptability in education. First and foremost, it promotes harmony among staff, which helps resolve conflict, create strong bonds among team members, and provide regular and constructive feedback. As a nurturing and nonconfrontational leadership style, it can have a powerful impact on organizational performance with its tenet, 'individuals come first'. By ensuring that staff feel interconnected, affiliative leaders are adept at teambuilding and forging alliances. Besides, affiliative leadership seems to be most effective when morale is low and teamwork is required to heal rifts, promote trust, and overcome stressful situations. Moreover, affiliative leaders trust that they will be reciprocated with loyalty and good performance by treating staff in a favorable manner. Additionally, [Goleman \(2013\)](#) posited that effective leaders often incorporate affiliative elements into their coaching or authoritative management style to foster an innovative work environment characterized by expert performers and high achievers. Since it is a highly collaborative style, affiliative leadership focuses on the emotional needs among staff rather than solely job requirements by emphasizing the smooth functioning and achievements of the entire team rather than the individual. Moreover, since they often value staff's feelings and emotions more than task completion, affiliative leaders tend to be highly perceptive of the emotional undercurrents of the team. Therefore, they apply effective interpersonal skills to foster collegial relationships based on mutual trust, respect, and acceptance. Lastly, since they excel in establishing favorable group dynamics, they often create a close-knit team where members collaborate well together and feel appreciated for their contributions.

According to [Dubberly \(2012\)](#), affiliative leadership is an important component of building collegial teams in education, which enables staff to collaboratively plan and implement the most effective curricula and instructional methods for students, particularly those with special needs. By propagating a welcoming and compassionate work atmosphere, it makes staff feel like family members who are treasured as unique individuals, not just as employees. This leadership style acknowledges each team member's socioemotional needs and individual personality traits. Therefore, it pays greater attention to, and cares for, the whole person, while identifying opportunities for consequential feedback. By avoiding performance-related criticisms, it rewards personal work ethic, morals, and principles as much as job performance. Moreover, its idea of caring for the whole person aligns well with inclusive education under SDG 4 Quality Education. Rather than solely focusing on intellectual achievement, affiliative school leaders and teachers often address students' needs in a holistic manner, including their sensory, socioemotional, and physiological concerns. Lastly, preference to accentuate fruitful feedback, while minimizing the need for confrontation helps align affiliative leadership with the tenets of behavior modification that are often implemented in education to yield desirable cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning outcomes.

In an attempt to determine leadership styles most preferred by architects, [Kasapoğlu \(2013\)](#) found that affiliative-democratic and affiliative-coaching leadership styles tend to be most favored in the construction industry. On the other hand, [Chapman, Johnson, and Kilner \(2014\)](#), who examined the predominant leadership styles among medical leaders, revealed that they tend to adopt active leadership styles, including affiliative, democratic, and authoritative styles. Lastly, [Wachira, Karanja, and Iravo \(2018\)](#) disclosed that affiliative leadership tends to be significantly related to project and organizational performance, characterized by empathy, relationship building, and interactive communication.

Under affiliative leadership, staff tend to adopt the most efficient methods to complete their work, which can lead to reduced pressure and more favorable performance outcomes ([Preston et al., 2015](#)). Affiliative leaders often possess the ability to drive motivation amongst staff through firm and consistent feedback. Through affirming commentary, they also tend to empower staff and augment their sense of value and achievement. This is particularly imperative nowadays since millennials, who are beginning to occupy the educational and corporate landscapes, value consistent and instant feedback. Accustomed to instant gratification, they constantly need encouraging remarks to stay motivated and perform well. Additionally, with their astute ability to forge strong emotional bonds with others, affiliative leaders often establish a firm foundation for diffusing synergistic team chemistry. By fostering a highly congenial and collaborative team, they promote smooth and amiable interactions amongst staff members, who become more willing to engage in productive conversation with one another to exchange novel ideas and perspectives. As aforementioned, companionship and camaraderie tend to increase under affiliative leadership, thus generating abundant feedback, while instilling a greater sense of belonging, work enthusiasm, and organizational commitment amongst staff.

[Rao \(2025\)](#) reiterated that several qualities appear to rank highly among affiliative leaders. They often excel at conflict resolution, focus on staff wellbeing, place staff at the heart of organizational success, and motivate staff with both tangible and intangible reinforcers. First, affiliative leaders are mediation experts who strive at creating harmony within the organization, which enables staff to readily confront and dismantle barriers and obstacles. When they sense any strife between staff, they are quick to intervene and help mend the relationship. Second, they often ask themselves if (1) staff are finding work to be a meaningful experience with challenging prospects, (2) staff feel appreciated for the work they are doing rather than being taken for granted, and (3) staff feel acknowledged as a unique individual rather than a mere cog in a wheel. These questions often float in their minds as they prioritize staff wellbeing, job motivation, and organizational commitment. Third, as people-oriented individuals, affiliative leaders will not hesitate to invest in staff wellness and healthcare. Because of their natural affinity toward staff wellbeing, they believe that job satisfaction and organizational success tend to occur simultaneously. Besides, they also emphasize that real success lies in a work culture characterized by high staff morale, improved staff retention, healthy work-life balance, and elevated organizational rankings. Lastly, with 'nurture, praise, repeat' as their mantra, they promote professional growth and development, performance efficacy, and organizational commitment amongst staff.

1.2. Statement of the Problem and Research Objective

A review of literature showed that quantitative research on college staff's perceptions of affiliative leadership and its impact on perceived organizational commitment is lacking in Malaysia, especially in the higher education landscape in Sabah. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to examine staff's perceptions of affiliative leadership and its impact on perceived organizational commitment at three PHEIs in Sabah, Malaysia, which helps fill the research gap and establish a theoretical framework for the study. Lastly, findings of this study would generate novel knowledge on the leadership styles of department heads at local PHEIs, besides offering recommendations to improve their management style.

1.3. Research questions

To narrow the research gap and provide a contextual framework for the study, three research questions were formulated to guide the research:

- i. What were the descriptive statistics of the affiliative leadership style of department heads at PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah and implications?
- ii. Were there any significant differences in lecturers' perceptions of affiliative leadership and perceived organizational commitment in terms of gender, age, and job experience?
- iii. Was affiliative leadership significantly related to lecturers' organizational commitment?

1.4. Scope of the Study

The study was limited to 56 teaching staff from three PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Deans, coordinators, and registrars from 10 randomly chosen PHEIs were contacted via email, but only three agreed to participate in the study. Respondents were drawn from culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse communities in Sabah. The sample size was determined based on both theoretical and statistical considerations. According to the central limit theorem, a minimum of 30 participants is generally sufficient to ensure adequate statistical power and generalizability for basic survey research ([Memon, et al., 2020](#); [Roscoe, 1975](#)). The sample was deemed representative of the local lecturers in the Kota Kinabalu area; hence, selection bias was minimized. Systematic random sampling of colleges was done for its ability to capture a diverse range of perspectives across different age, gender, and work experience. By allowing all eligible PHEIs an equal chance of selection, this method helps prevent the under- or over-representation of specific groups, while increasing the generalizability of findings to a broader population of PHEI lecturers.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study was the first to examine affiliative leadership among department heads at PHEIs in Sabah, where educational leadership research is scarce. Findings have the potential to promote affiliative leadership as a management style to improve organizational effectiveness, staff motivation, and organization commitment. Further, this study will increase understanding on how affiliative leadership impacts PHEI teams and individual academics, while allowing top management to engender better morale, collaboration, engagement, and innovativeness amongst staff in line with SDG 4 Quality Education. Lastly, this study provides recommendations for the development of affiliative leadership, besides providing PHEIs with a framework to effectively manage academic

teams and achieve organizational goals by inculcating positive interpersonal connections and establishing a harmonious and supportive higher education landscape characterized by trust, empathy, and cohesiveness.

2. Review of Literature

The literature review provides an overview and synthesis of existing knowledge and research on affiliative leadership in relation to organizational commitment. It helps establish a foundation for novel research by identifying key theories, methodologies, and debates within affiliative leadership and organizational commitment, thus acting as a bridge between existing knowledge and new research, while demonstrating the writers' understanding of the key variables and justifying the need for further research. Lastly, by synthesizing existing theories and models, the literature review also helps develop a coherent theoretical framework for the study, identify gaps in the literature, and establish the context and background of the quantitative research.

2.1. Attributes of Affiliative Style

[Gurley and Wilson \(2011\)](#), who examined the impact of virtual simulation on leadership skills, found that MBA students who adopt affiliative managerial style tend to focus less on organizational goals compared to other leadership styles, particularly in terms of financial and customer goals. In contrast, affiliative students tend to score lower in terms of using personal influence to attain goals, while consistently expressing less negative feedback than other styles. Findings imply that affiliative students tend to refrain from making undesirable statements, which is often a formidable challenge for aspiring leaders. Since many students tend to report this style with no or little management experience, they need to acquire conflict resolution skills before facing the real world. They also need to understand when and how to provide constructive feedback. Therefore, leadership training at PHEIs should aim at modifying students' leadership behavior to enhance their employability and career progression. Since conceptually-based classroom training is insufficient to cause behavioral and attitudinal changes, simulations and leadership internships should be practiced to promote conceptual learning with practice in a self-paced environment equipped with innovative management tools and techniques.

2.2. Impact of affiliative leadership

[Siddiqui, Bilal, and ud Din \(2023\)](#), who sought to establish the effect of affiliative leadership on IT project attainment, revealed that affiliative leadership tends to significantly influence project accomplishment, with team performance playing a mediating role. Findings imply the thrust of the interrelationships among affiliative leadership, project success, and team outcomes, which can extend their applicability to practitioners and researchers in diverse settings. In an empirical study that examined the transformative impact of affiliative leadership on headteachers at public high schools, [Acharya \(2024\)](#) disclosed that affiliative leadership tends to prioritize inclusivity, collaboration, and empowerment to instill an amicable and affable school culture. For example, being resilient and accountable, affiliative headteachers tend to emphasize the general welfare of both students and staff, thus ensuring that everyone feels scaffolded and appreciated. Moreover, their commitment to inclusive leadership also tends to cause a desirable shift in school governance, with staff expressing greater satisfaction and trust in their leaders. Further, affiliative headteachers also tend to frequently share their ideas and concerns without apprehension, which leads to high solidarity in the school

environment. Additionally, affiliative headteachers often adopt staff-oriented and affirming strategies that promote diversity, teamwork, and a highly interpersonal school culture. Lastly, by scaffolding collaboration and recognizing individual strengths, they often propagate a culture that appropiates and endorses every staff. Their approach not only challenges conventional leadership norms, but it also yields improved job satisfaction, staff empowerment and engagement, and ultimately, organizational commitment.

2.3. Organizational Commitment in Malaysia

In their comprehensive review on organizational commitment, [Pee, Chung, and Al-Khaled \(2022\)](#) postulated that many Malaysian organizations tend to experience difficulty in generating a sense of commitment and loyalty amongst employees, especially younger professionals. Nowadays, low organizational commitment is often associated with fresh graduates who tend to resign after working for a short while, often opting for another job offer despite a meager pay difference. Moreover, the impact of rewards on organizational commitment tends to benefit the more established PHEIs, especially international branch campuses in Malaysia. In contrast, smaller PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu often offer much lower remuneration and smaller benefits packages compared to their renowned counterparts, thus indirectly leading to lower organizational commitment and higher staff attrition. Therefore, staffing and reward practices remain a critical human resource management issue for the less prominent PHEIs that often face lower enrolment rates and earn less revenue. Further, lifelong learning and professional development also play a crucial role in organizational commitment because they help expand the expertise base and raise the competency levels needed by academics to obtain promotions and tenure. Lastly, having the relevant job specifications also significantly influences organizational commitment; academics require appropriate job scopes with reasonable remuneration to equip them with the flexibility and tangible/nontangible motivation to increase their productivity and level of organizational commitment.

In their quantitative study, [Klassen and Chiu \(2011\)](#) reported that preservice teachers' stress and classroom management self-efficacy tend to significantly influence occupational commitment; those with greater overall instructional stress or teaching assignment stress tend to display lower occupational commitment. In contrast, those with greater classroom management self-efficacy, but lower levels of pedagogical stress and contextual barriers also tend to exhibit greater occupational commitment and higher intention to continue the profession.

2.4. Affiliative Leadership and Organizational Commitment

[Jung and Kim \(2012\)](#) discovered that newspaper firm employees who suffer from burnout tend to demonstrate diminished organizational commitment and increased turnover intention. Additionally, they also tend to experience a higher level of exhaustion and a diminished sense of professional efficacy. Besides, overloading, a non-autonomous, non-supportive work environment, job dissatisfaction, undesirable remuneration level, toxic coworkers and supervisors, and poor promotion opportunities tend to be contributing factors of burnout, which leads to diminished organizational commitment and increased turnover intention. Nevertheless, [Thoha and Avandana \(2020\)](#), who investigated the leadership styles among project managers and their impact on team performance, revealed that affiliative leadership tends to have a significantly positive impact on team performance. Findings imply affiliative leadership tends to provide the best milieu for

team performance in projects with a high level of complexity, including the increasingly intricate and manifold administrative and academic endeavors at PHEIs in Malaysia.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Approach

This study adopted a quantitative research approach, which was deemed appropriate for systematically investigating perceived attributes linked to affiliative leadership and organizational commitment. The research design was directly related to the primary purpose of the current study, which was to investigate the impact of affiliative leadership on PHEI lecturers' organizational commitment in Sabah, Malaysia. Besides, using a quantitative method also allowed the writers to practice numerical evaluation and precise measurement of the relationship between affiliative leadership and organizational commitment at PHEIs. Lastly, it also enabled them to determine if significant differences existed in affiliative leadership and organizational commitment in terms of gender, age, and job experience by using SPSS 29.0.

Besides, this study utilized two structured, Likert-scale questionnaires that facilitated efficient data collection from PHEI lecturers, while guaranteeing adequate representation within the sample. The survey method could enhance not just the reliability and validity of the research findings, but also their generalizability to broader PHEI contexts. Furthermore, this study design also permitted effective statistical analysis via SPSS 29.0, which could furnish numerical-based information needed to report findings, draw conclusions, and make recommendations on how to leverage affiliative leadership to augment organizational commitment among PHEI lecturers.

3.2. Research Location

This study was conducted in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, the capital city of the island state where quantitative research on leadership styles at PHEIs is scarce. Kota Kinabalu was chosen for its distinctive educational landscape, which includes several PHEIs that can provide a sufficiently representative sample of the lecturer population in Sabah, thus allowing for a relatively fair assessment of lecturers' perceptions of affiliative leadership in relation to organizational commitment.

3.3. Sample and Justification

The sample of this study comprised 56 lecturers ($n = 56$) from three PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. All participants possess at least a bachelor's degree and are currently working full-time in their respective institutions. Initially, deans, coordinators, and registrars of 10 randomly PHEIs were contacted via email, but eventually, only three agreed to participate in the study. Subsequently, administrators who exhibited interest in the study shared the survey link with lecturers and urged them to respond. This selection procedure prioritized voluntary participation and convenient access, thus yielding a realistic and contextually relevant sample.

Respondents come from culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse communities in Sabah. The sample size was determined based on both theoretical and statistical considerations. According to the central limit theorem, a minimum of 30 participants is generally sufficient to ensure statistical power and generalizability for basic survey

research (Roscoe, 1975; RUBIKTOP, 2023). Additionally, the sample was deemed representative of lecturers from the local PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu; hence, selection bias was minimized. Systematic random sampling of colleges was done for its ability to capture a diverse range of perspectives across different age, gender, and work experience among respondents. By allowing all eligible PHEIs an equal chance of selection, this method could prevent the under- or over-representation of specific groups, while increasing the generalizability of findings to a broader population of PHEI lecturers.

PHEIs were chosen based on their physical proximity to the university college where the first author serves as program leader in its Master of Education in Leadership. In general, the study was delimited by proximity, accessibility, and administrators' willingness to participate in the research study. A total of 56 lecturers responded to the questionnaires online; completion of the questionnaires was interpreted as informed permission, with all participants assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

While the sample size seemed small, it met the minimum requirement for quantitative research in the social sciences, particularly in educational leadership and educational psychology. For example, Roscoe (1975) recommended a sample size of 30 to 500 for most statistical research. This rule of thumb is supported by the central limit theorem, which stipulates that sampling distributions will approach normality when there are 30 or more respondents, allowing for acceptable statistical inference. Furthermore, the current sample size ensured a reasonable margin of error and enough power to identify modest effects in nonparametric analyses, such as the Kruskal-Wallis, Mann-Whitney U, and Wilcoxon signed rank tests, which were used to interpret data in the current study.

The sample consisted of 32.1 percent males and 67.9 percent females. Age-wise, 39.3 percent are 25 to 35 years old, 33.9 percent are 36 to 46 years old, 19.6 percent are 47 to 57 years old, and 7.1 percent are above 57 years old. Experience-wise, 21.4 percent have worked for less than five years, 16.1 percent have worked for six to 11 years, 35.7 percent have worked for 12 to 17 years, 8.9 percent have worked for 18 to 23 years, and 8.9 percent have worked for more than 23 years (see Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents ($n = 56$)

| Item | Profile | Description | Frequency | Percentage |
|------|------------------------|----------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Gender | Male | 18 | 32.1% |
| | | Female | 38 | 67.9% |
| 2 | Age | 25-35 years | 22 | 39.3% |
| | | 36-46 years | 19 | 33.9% |
| | | 47-57 years | 11 | 19.6% |
| | | above 57 years | 4 | 7.1% |
| 3 | Job Experience (years) | Less than 5 | 12 | 21.4% |
| | | 6-11 | 9 | 16.1% |
| | | 12-17 | 20 | 35.7% |
| | | 18-23 | 5 | 8.9% |
| | | More than 23 | 5 | 8.9% |

3.4. Instruments

Two structured questionnaires were administered to examine the impact of affiliative leadership on lecturers' organizational commitment at three PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu,

Sabah. The Affiliative Leadership Questionnaire consists of 16 Likert-scale items derived from the literature (Goleman, 2013; Gurley & Wilson, 2011; Knights, 2022). Organizational commitment was measured by adapting the 18-item Organizational Commitment Scales designed by Allen and Meyer (1990).

3.4.1. Cronbach's Alpha Values

To determine the reliability of the questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted on 25 teachers and data were analyzed by using SPSS 29.0. Cronbach analysis was used to assess their reliabilities; results indicated that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the Affiliative Leadership Questionnaire is .80, while that of the Organizational Commitment Scales is .75 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha values of Key Variables

| Variables | Means | Cronbach's alpha values |
|---------------------------|---------|-------------------------|
| Affiliative leadership | 3.78/5 | .80 |
| Organizational commitment | 66.6/90 | .75 |

3.4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was also conducted by using SPSS 29.0; results showed that the Cronbach's alpha value of affiliative leadership is .97, while that of organizational commitment is .94 (see Table 3).

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Key Variables

| Variables | Cronbach's alpha | Composite reliability (rho a) | Composite reliability (rho c) | Average variance extracted |
|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Affiliative leadership | 0.968 | 0.971 | 0.972 | 0.684 |
| Organizational commitment | 0.938 | 0.947 | 0.946 | 0.500 |

3.5. Data Collection and Analysis

PHEI Lecturers were required to complete the two questionnaires online. They were told that completion of the surveys was their indication of consent to voluntarily participate in the study. Ethical issues were prioritized throughout the data collection procedure. All participants were given informed consent in relation to the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, and the possibility to withdraw at any time without any repercussions. To ensure confidentiality, all responses were anonymized and the data were securely stored. Only the first writer has access to the data, thus guaranteeing that they would be used solely for scholarly purposes.

Data were automatically transferred onto a spreadsheet and subsequently analyzed using SPSS 29.0. First, means and percentages on the two key variables were calculated. Second, Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in lecturers' perceptions of affiliative leadership in relation to age and job experience. Third, Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were any significant differences in terms of gender. Fourth, Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to determine if any of the affiliative leadership items were significant at a hypothesized value of 3.5. Lastly, Pearson

correlation was used to determine if a significant relationship existed between the two key variables.

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Mean of PHEI lecturers' perceptions of affiliative leadership, together with organizational commitment was calculated. Results showed that the mean of affiliative leadership was 3.78, while that of organizational commitment was 66.6 (see [Table 2](#)).

Percentages of agreement (strongly agree/agree) were collapsed to gain an overview of lecturers' perceptions of affiliative leadership among department heads in at three PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Results showed that only a low proportion of PHEI lecturers tend to perceive their department heads as affiliative (48.3 to 64.3 percent). Lastly, only low percentages (42.9 to 58.5 percent) of PHEI lecturers tend to demonstrate organizational commitment (see [Table 4](#)).

Table 4: Percentages of Agreement on Key Variables

| My department head believes that ... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4+5 (Collapsed) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|--------------------|
| 1. They emphasize staff's professional and individual development in line with SDG 4 Quality Education | 8.9 | 12.5 | 25 | 25 | 28.6 | 53.6 |
| 2. Team harmony is just as important as attaining final outcomes or results | 8.9 | 3.6 | 26.8 | 35.7 | 25 | 60.7 |
| 3. They are responsible for conflict resolution | 8.9 | 10.7 | 25 | 35.7 | 19.6 | 55.3 |
| 4. A collegial and collaborative environment is essential to meet staff's emotional needs | 10.7 | 12.5 | 19.6 | 41.1 | 16.1 | 57.5 |
| 5. Staff's unique emotional needs should be met to promote productivity and organizational commitment | 8.9 | 12.5 | 25 | 39.3 | 14.3 | 53.6 |
| 6. They need to keep staff happy to enhance their job motivation and on-task behavior | 7.1 | 10.7 | 32.1 | 32.1 | 17.9 | 50 |
| 7. They treat staff as people who deserve respect | 5.4 | 7.1 | 23.2 | 33.9 | 30.4 | 64.3 |
| 8. Their rewards and recognition are personalized according to staff's attributes | 5.4 | 12.5 | 30.4 | 25 | 26.8 | 51.8 |
| 9. Ethical-moral values are critical for staff's development and organizational sustainability | 7.1 | 8.9 | 35.7 | 30.4 | 17.9 | 48.3 |
| 10. They provide extrinsic incentives (gifts, bonus) and intrinsic incentives (encouragement, praise) to enhance staff's performance | 7.1 | 8.9 | 25 | 37.5 | 21.4 | 58.9 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 11. They adopt flexible measures to reduce job stress and burnout | 10.7 | 14.3 | 23.2 | 37.5 | 14.3 | 51.8 |
| 12. They emphasize open communication, positive interpersonal interactions, and constructive feedback. | 7.1 | 5.4 | 28.6 | 42.9 | 16.1 | 59 |
| 13. They establish collegial and close-knit teams | 10.7 | 5.4 | 25 | 44.6 | 14.3 | 58.9 |
| 14. They encourage staff to share their feelings, thoughts, and ideas | 8.9 | 12.5 | 23.2 | 35.7 | 19.6 | 55.3 |
| 15. They instill trust and respect by showing interest in staff's wellbeing | 8.9 | 10.7 | 17.9 | 44.6 | 17.9 | 62.5 |
| 16. They promptly resolve conflicts before they escalate | 5.4 | 14.3 | 21.4 | 39.3 | 19.6 | 58.9 |
| 17. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization | 12.5 | 8.9 | 28.6 | 32.1 | 17.9 | 50 |
| 18. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own | 10.7 | 8.9 | 30.4 | 30.4 | 19.6 | 50 |
| 19. I feel like "part of my family" at this organization | 16.1 | 7.1 | 21.4 | 32.1 | 23.2 | 55.3 |
| 20. I feel "emotionally attached" to this organization | 10.7 | 12.5 | 33.9 | 28.6 | 14.3 | 42.9 |
| 21. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me | 7.1 | 5.4 | 35.7 | 37.5 | 14.3 | 51.8 |
| 22. I feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization | 8.9 | 5.4 | 35.7 | 25 | 25 | 50 |
| 23. It would be very hard for me to leave this organization right now even if I wanted to. | 10.7 | 10.7 | 23.2 | 28.6 | 26.8 | 55.4 |
| 24. Too much of my life would be disrupted if I leave this organization | 8.9 | 8.9 | 33.9 | 28.6 | 19.6 | 48.2 |
| 25. Right now, staying at this organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire | 3.6 | 3.6 | 33.9 | 32.1 | 26.8 | 58.9 |
| 26. I believe I have too few options to consider leaving this organization | 5.4 | 7.1 | 30.4 | 35.7 | 21.4 | 57.1 |
| 27. A consequence of leaving my job at this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives elsewhere | 8.9 | 3.6 | 39.3 | 32.1 | 16.1 | 48.2 |
| 28. I continue to work for this organization since leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice | 7.1 | 5.4 | 33.9 | 28.6 | 25 | 53.6 |
| 29. I feel obligated to remain with this organization | 7.1 | 12.5 | 26.8 | 33.9 | 19.6 | 53.5 |
| 30. Even if it were to my advantage, I feel it would be wrong to leave this organization | 12.5 | 10.7 | 28.6 | 28.6 | 19.6 | 48.2 |
| 31. I would feel guilty if I left this organization now | 14.3 | 5.4 | 28.6 | 28.6 | 21.4 | 50 |
| 32. This organization deserves my loyalty | 8.9 | 1.8 | 32.1 | 28.6 | 28.6 | 57.2 |
| 33. I am staying in this organization right now because of my sense of obligation to it | 10.7 | 3.6 | 33.9 | 35.7 | 16.1 | 51.8 |
| 34. I owe a great deal to this organization | 8.9 | 5.4 | 35.7 | 25 | 25 | 50 |

Affiliative: 1 to 16; Organizational commitment: 17 to 34

4.2. Inferential Statistics

Nonparametric tests showed that there were no significant differences by way of gender, age, and job experience in affiliative leadership and organizational commitment (see Table 5).

Table 5: Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H Results

| Affiliative | Nonparametric test | p-value |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| Gender | Mann-Whitney U test | 0.309 |
| Age | Kruskal-Wallis H test | 0.855 |
| Job Experience | Kruskal-Wallis H test | 0.228 |
| Organizational commitment | Nonparametric test | p-value |
| Gender | Mann-Whitney U test | 0.321 |
| Age | Kruskal-Wallis H test | 0.823 |
| Job Experience | Kruskal-Wallis H test | 0.222 |

Wilcoxon signed rank test based on a hypothesized value of 3.5 showed that all the affiliative leadership items were significant at $p < 0.001$, having medians that were significantly different from the test value, and were likely to indicate strong disagreement (see Table 6).

Table 6: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on Affiliative Leadership (Hypothesized Value = 3.5)

| My department head believes that ... | p-value | Conclusion |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| They emphasize staff’s professional and individual development in line with SDG 4 Quality Education | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| Team harmony is just as important as attaining final outcomes or results | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| They are responsible for conflict resolution | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| A collegial and collaborative environment is essential to meet staff’s emotional needs | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| Staff’s unique emotional needs should be met to promote productivity and organizational commitment | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| They need to keep staff happy to enhance their job motivation and on-task behavior | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| They treat staff as people who deserve respect | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| Their rewards and recognition are personalized according to staff’s attributes | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| Ethical-moral values are critical for staff’s development and organizational sustainability | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |

| | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| They provide extrinsic incentives (gifts, bonus) and intrinsic incentives (encouragement, praise) to enhance staff's performance | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| They adopt flexible measures to reduce job stress and burnout | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| They emphasize open communication, positive interpersonal interactions, and constructive feedback. | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| They establish collegial and close-knit teams | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| They encourage staff to share their feelings, thoughts, and ideas | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| They instill trust and respect by showing interest in staff's wellbeing | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |
| They promptly resolve conflicts before they escalate | <0.001 | Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement |

*** $p < 0.001$

Lastly, Pearson correlations showed that all three dimensions of perceived organizational commitment were significantly related to affiliative leadership, ranging from .76 to .90 at $p < .01$ (see Table 7).

Table 7: Pearson Correlations Between Key Variables

| Organizational Commitment | Pearson Correlations | Affiliative Leadership |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Affective | Sig. (2-tailed) <i>n</i> | ** .902 56 |
| Continuance | Sig. (2-tailed) <i>n</i> | ** .756 56 |
| Normative | Sig. (2-tailed) <i>n</i> | ** .795 56 |

** $p < .01$

5. Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

First, nonparametric tests showed that there were no significant differences by way of gender, age, and job experience in lecturers' perceptions of affiliative leadership and organizational commitment. Findings imply that demographic characteristics do not significantly influence lecturers' perceptions of the two key variables. Second, the mean score of affiliative leadership was below average, while that of organizational commitment was low. Third, only low percentages of lecturers tend to perceive their department heads as affiliative. Fourth, Wilcoxon signed rank test based on a hypothesized value of 3.5 showed that all affiliative leadership items were significant at p

<0.001, having medians that were significantly different from the test value and were likely to indicate strong disagreement. Lastly, Pearson correlations showed that perceived organizational commitment tends to be significantly and positively related to affiliative leadership.

5.2. Implications

5.2.1. Authoritarian Leadership Style

Current findings imply that high percentages of PHEI lecturers tend to perceive their department heads as non-affiliative. Previous research showed that Malaysian leaders tend to be authoritarian rather than affiliative. According to [Means \(1996\)](#), rather than wholesale transplanting of British-style democratic institutions, Malaysia, with its colonial past, tends to practice soft authoritarianism after gaining independence in 1963. The colonial system, even in its most beneficent and cordial phases, has been highly authoritarian, which long influences each ethnic community to support leaders based on traditional status hierarchies.

[Kennedy and Mansor \(2000\)](#) reiterated that Malaysians' preferred leadership behaviors tend to mirror their own cultural propensities, evidencing more of a traditional leadership style, particularly in terms of diplomacy and modesty. Moreover, in the context of leading a team, the aspect of face/countenance is also important. Overall, effective leaders in Malaysia tend to be seen as those who can achieve tangible outcomes, while respecting the fundamental sociocultural values of compassion and community.

As aforementioned, Malaysian leaders are expected to show compassion, while adopting more of an autocratic leadership. Besides, Malaysians tend to emphasize collective wellbeing and display a strong humane orientation within a society that venerates social standing and hierarchical rungs. Since the culture discourages overly assertive, contentious behavior, it gives priority to maintaining harmony through stratified relationships; hence, staff and management often try to avoid actions that are incompatible with these values and expectations ([Kennedy, 2002](#)).

On the other hand, [Slater \(2003\)](#) asserted that Malaysia has long been regarded as one of the most institutionalized party-states in the developing world; therefore, it is not surprising that many educational institutions in Malaysia tend to be authoritarian. Many Malaysian organizations tend to enhance the leader's infrastructural power over opposition, which can be seen in the personalization of power in the nation, whereby aspiring autocratic leaders tend to take advantage of highly institutionalized organizations to enhance their inherent power, while trying to maintain their resilience in the face of pressures for greater autonomy.

Reiterating that Malaysia tends to have a high-context culture, [Mahfooz, Zainal, and Rehana \(2004\)](#) maintained that its leaders prefer to spend time building personal relationships that transcend the workplace, often characterized by an unwritten code governing relationships and differentiating superiors, subordinates, and peers. Since harmonious relationships are prioritized, many leaders uphold the subtle 'polite system' that abhors adverse or contravening feedback and criticism. Consequently, maintaining amenable and gracious relationships is regarded as much more beneficial than accomplishing contractual tasks. Seniors, including superiors and elders, are revered as decision-makers whom subordinates are compelled to follow. Besides, societal norms

also dictate that juniors forge with seniors, while superiors are obliged to provide patronage. This ranked and graded relationship is accentuated through affective reciprocity that fuels dependency among subordinates. Lastly, Malays tend to be slightly more hierarchy-oriented toward building relationships with the sense of responsibility to assist friends, relatives, and neighbors through nonbusiness networks. The Chinese, on the other hand, prefer to incorporate business dealings into hierarchical relationships embedded in delegative leadership.

5.2.2. Low Organizational Commitment

Current findings imply that PHEI lecturers tend to exhibit low organizational commitment. [Ahmad and Bakar \(2003\)](#) found that continuance commitment tends to be insignificantly related to training opportunities, support for training, and learning motivation among Malaysian white-collar employees. Many Malaysian workers rarely feel that they must remain in an organization even though it has provided training and support despite their learning motivation. Besides, older employees who have stayed longer in an organization do not necessarily intend to obtain a promotion or tenure, probably due to the uncertain business environment in Malaysia.

[Noordin et al. \(2011\)](#) reiterated that, while Malaysian managers appear to be basically collectivist, socioeconomic development may have decreased their normative organizational commitment, besides job insecurity and other disavowing or invalidating factors. Moreover, neither personal commitment nor positional tenure tends to significantly influence their overall organizational commitment. Further, Malaysians tend to display lower organizational commitment probably due to the cultural changes associated with socioeconomic development, structural change, appreciated real income, and increased individualism, which may lead them to prioritize personal goals over ingroup goals; that is, they may remain or leave an organization based on individual choice and personal gratification rather than organizational commitment.

On the other hand, [Ibrahim Alzame et al. \(2020\)](#) asserted that organizational commitment tends to be influenced by work life quality. Employees who are less satisfied with work life tend to have less obligation to continue in their organization, besides showing lower acceptance of the working conditions or job demands, which will eventually increase their turnover intention. Overall, organizational commitment tends to be an important predictor of intention to stay/leave; evidently, employees who exhibit low organizational commitment are more likely to have a higher intention to leave, thus evidencing shorter tenure.

Rather than being affiliative, Malaysian educational leaders tend to be paternalistic. [Tharikh and Hamzah \(2020\)](#) posited that many Malaysian companies have attempted to replace their traditional hierarchical management structures with paternalistic leadership to empower work teams and improve efficiency and productivity. Paternalistic leadership is popular in Malaysia, which has a relationship-oriented society that emphasizes the culture of collectivism characterized by trust, devotion, and a sense of belonging. Therefore, Malaysian leaders tend to practice a caring leadership that consolidates resilience, concern, and kindness. On the other hand, [Thien et al. \(2022\)](#), who explored school leaders' value-driven leadership practices at Malaysian primary schools, provided a contextualization of servant-, authentic-, and ethical-leadership attributes. To deal with challenging situations at schools, value-laden leaders tend to advocate conflict tolerance, discipline, gentility, and humility. Lastly, they also emphasize the importance

of fostering trust, equity, responsibility, rational problem solving, and collaborative decision-making.

Lastly, [Meng and Von \(2023\)](#) appraised the factors associated with low organizational commitment among Malaysians, including job instability, increased workplace conflicts, job stress, limited resources, and negative feedback. Employees who experience less job stability and increased workplace conflicts tend to display weaker emotional attachment and lower commitment to their organization, thus leading to higher intentions to leave their job. Besides, job stress also tends to decrease organizational commitment and increase turnover intention, resulting in lower employee morale, dedication, and loyalty. Additionally, limited resources and unpleasant feedback tend to elevate levels of stress and burnout, thus leading to lower organizational commitment. Lastly, employees with low commitment tend to display higher absenteeism, commit more mistakes, experience greater stress levels, be less productive, and possess a greater intention to resign.

5.3. Recommendations

5.3.1. *Improvisational Theatre for Affiliative Leadership*

[Gagnon, Vough, and Nickerson \(2012\)](#) asserted that improvisational theatre training can be used to inculcate affiliative leadership skills and values because it creates a compelling experience of cocreation through interaction to build a distinctive kind of leadership. Since affiliative leadership tends to be relational, collaborative, and shared, improvisational theater and its main skill areas, principles, and methods can help build a contemporary model of developing affiliative leadership. According to [Morrow et al. \(2025\)](#), improvisational theater is an innovative method that can be used for leadership development. Affiliative leadership rejects the idea of an authoritarian leader; instead, it embraces an approach that focuses on situational, multi-individual leadership emerging from the needs of 21st century organizations. Together with leadership-as-practice development, improvisational theater can help cultivate affiliative skills that allow aspiring leaders to acquire inclusive leadership knowledge and abilities characterized by effective interpersonal and sociocultural dynamics. Lastly, improvisational theater activities encourage individuals to act vicariously and examine authentic sociopolitical, sustainability, and organizational issues by opening the imperceptible space for collective development, which elevates the entire organization and its capability to adapt to the everchanging world.

5.3.2. *Organizational Trust for Organizational Commitment*

[Dahmardeh and Nastiezaie \(2019\)](#) found that organizational trust tends to have a positive and significant effect on organizational commitment. In contrast, intention to leave, delayed work, absenteeism, poor work quality, lack of organizational loyalty, avoidance of extracurricular activities, superficial matters, and employee misconduct tend to indicate low organizational commitment. Additionally, rumors, pessimism, and false fears often exacerbate the forbidding factors. To retain committed employees, PHEIs should provide the conditions that actualize their potential, thereby improving organizational outcomes. Organizational effectiveness and commitment can be enhanced through mutual trust between the PHEI management and staff; higher management should involve staff in participative decision-making, which makes them feel more committed to the organization by making more accurate decisions and broadening their competencies to effectively tackle challenging tasks.

5.3.2. Performance Appraisal System for Organizational Commitment

Human resource practitioners should consider to formulate a well-structured performance appraisal system to maximize staff's motivation and organizational commitment (Pee, Chung, & Al-Khaled, 2022). At PHEIs, bonus is of secondary importance compared to other types of intrinsic rewards (praise, recognition, and training and promotional opportunities). Besides, PHEIs need to better manage millennial employees as they tend to have lower levels of organizational commitment. They can start paying more attention to nonmonetary inducements for the younger employees; for example, by offering them more opportunities to engage in challenging, yet achievable tasks. Besides, adopting a more participative approach should be implemented to actively involve staff in critical thinking and innovative problem-solving, besides equipping them with a clearer vision of how they can advance at the organization. In brief, an affiliative management style together with a well-structured reward system enables PHEIs to maximize their endeavor in increasing the organizational commitment among younger employees in a long-run. Lastly, since there is no significant correlation between job hopping and organizational commitment among millennials (Pee, Chung, & Al-Khaled, 2022), those who are involved in staff recruitment should refrain from using job hopping as a key criterion in hiring decisions.

5.3.3. Concluding Remarks

The current study is significant in exploring an emerging educational management model, that is, affiliative leadership, in the Malaysian context, thus yielding theoretical significance. Findings can add to the limited body of literature to show that affiliative leadership can be successfully integrated into a highly centralized educational context. Nevertheless, it has a few limitations. First and foremost, the small sample size raises concern about selection bias. Lecturers' responses might be influenced by social desirability that could lead to misrepresentation of their actual attitudes, preferences, or intentions.

Moreover, convenience sampling tends to affect the ability to generalize the findings of this study. Future research should use a larger and more diverse sample from different geographical areas to yield more generalizable results in the Malaysian context. Additionally, the current worldwide socioeconomic situation might influence lecturers' responses. The millennials, who prefer shorter tenure, might have intention to leave their PHEI; however, due to financial, social, and personal reasons, they may perceive organizational commitment as the most important factor influencing their intention to stay put at present. Finally, this study was delimited by time constraints, availability of respondents, and willingness of college authorities to participate in data collection. To reduce internal validity threats and increase generalizability of findings, future research should adopt larger, randomized samples from different states, besides using culturally appropriate instruments and other socially acceptable methods (interviews, focus groups) to collect more valid and reliable data.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study has strictly adhered to all ethical procedures involving the use of human subjects. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents who were ascertained of their anonymity, with their responses kept strictly confidential. They were also informed

that the study was of low risk and that they could stop participating any time without any repercussions.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no potential conflict of interest regarding this study in terms of the research, or publication of this article.

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