Empowering Employees to Organizational Commitment — Scrutinizing the Mediation Role of Transformational Leadership

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Abstract

A healthy relationship between leader and followers is necessary for employees' empowerment and commitment. Previous studies reveal the effectiveness of transformational leadership in bringing positive outcomes to the organization. The study's objective is to determine the relationship between employee empowerment and commitment and examine the mediation role of transformational leadership in this relationship. The study uses a quantitative method by using a survey collected from a sample of 151 in the selected Government Linked Companies (GLCs) in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. Findings show that there is a relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment (Pearson Correlation, r=0.577), and transformational leadership mediates the relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment (Sobel test shows p<0.005). Findings suggest that empowered employees result in commitment, and transformational leadership plays significant mediation in increasing empowerment through commitment. Transformational leadership should be practiced in empowering employees to organizational commitment.

Keywords: *Empowerment, Commitment, Transformational leadership, Follower-leader relationship, Organizational effectiveness, Government Linked Companies (GLCs)*

I. INTRODUCTION

Committed employees are the asset for an organization as they are the ones who make the wheels of a business turn. They are valuable than skilful employees and willing to put extraordinary effort into their tasks in the organization. Studies have discussed that committed employees show positive work-related behaviour and loyalty, putting in more effort [1], a willingness to stay in an organization [2] and crucial in influencing employee creativity and innovation [3] The critical aspect of having committed employees in the organization is the lack of employee turnover intent and actual turnover [4] Scrutinizing employee's commitment is vital to an organizational leader for determining the turnover intentions and organizational benefits and profitability [5].

Nurturing and retaining employee commitment is a challenge to organizations worldwide. Every organization should understand the factors to increase employee commitment for human capital optimization. Previous studies demonstrate employees' empowerment as one of the ways to gain employee commitment as it creates a sense of ownership to the employees and provides job autonomy [6]. Empowerment enables employees to envision the future and have greater feelings towards the organization [7]. They are motivated to do their tasks, have competency and autonomy over their job [8].

The empowerment process to gain commitment requires a strong leadership element. Transformational leadership is the most debatable leadership in the last decades for employee empowerment and commitment [9], [10], [11]. Developed from transactional leadership, transformational leadership focuses on increasing the performance of individuals. It emphasizes followers' or individuals' needs and transforming their needs and expectations [1]. Transformational leadership can foster an atmosphere of trust, nurture employee certainty, and encourage advancement [12]. Studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of transformational leadership in influencing engagement [13], [14] innovation [15], [16], job satisfaction and job performance [17].

In achieving the organizational goals and realize competitive advantages in the market, employee commitment is essential. Previous studies have found employee commitment to be significant [1], [2], [3] & [4] and proven to bring positive changes to the organization. Studies also revealed that employees' empowerment could generate commitment [6]. As the needs committed employees in the organization to gain competitive advantages, it is necessary to explore how employee empowerment can increase an employee's commitment. The focus of this study is to examine how empowerment significantly contributes to employee commitment in the organization. This study also highlights the mediation role of transformational leadership in bringing employee commitment through employee empowerment.

II. EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is the process of giving lower-level employees the authority to make decisions and responsibility for it [18], [19] enhance self-efficacy feelings by identifying conditions for their removal through formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information among organizational members [20]. Through empowerment, employees possess the autonomy to make decisions for daily activities [21], [22] and it creates ownership of the jobs and helps to initiate the urgency to improve the process continually, product and services, and endeavor for the customers' needs [23].

Previous studies discuss three types of empowerment, including behavioral, psychological, and structural. Behavioral empowerment is empowerment that focuses on the role of top management in employee empowerment. Top management's role influences the process of employee empowerment [24]. Psychological empowerment is a motivational construct which demonstrated four cognitions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. These four cognitions reflect an active orientation of work role, which means that they refer to the value of a work goal. Competence refers to the self-efficacy for individuals to perform their work. Self-determination refers to the autonomy in the initiation and communication of work behavior. Impact reflects the degree to which an individual can influence their work [8]. Structural empowerment refers to the delegation of authority and responsibility for the employees. It focuses on the values and ideas of democracy in all power levels [20].

Employee empowerment is vital not only for the business environment but also for human resources development. Employees at every level require skills, knowledge, and competency to make a swift decision in the fast-paced business environment [22]. Empowerment increases the motivation of employees because of job autonomy. Once an employee has given job ownership, they have a greater willingness in decision making, take risks for the improvement and speak out any dissatisfaction. It encourages employee involvement, expects employees to think, recognizes employee values, and rewards employee ownership of processes, products, and services [23].

Previous studies have emphasized the significance of employee empowerment in positive organizational outcomes. For example, psychological empowerment is positively related to organizational citizenship behavior [24], behavioral and psychological empowerment is positively associated with job satisfaction [25], [26] as well as creativity and innovation [27], [28]. Hence, empowering employees is crucial for organizational success and brings out positive outcomes for the organization.

III. EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT

[29] have defined commitment as the psychological state that binds the individuals to the organization and makes them stay in the organization. The psychological link between employees and their organization may reduce the intention to withdraw from the organization. It is a passion and willingness to invest effort, respectively, to contribute to an employer's success. Employee commitment boosts the achievement of full employees' engagement and satisfaction [30]. Commitment is significant in reducing withdrawal intention. Therefore, managers should focus on increasing the employees' commitment [31]. The significance of having committed employees in an organization is reduced turnover and increased attachment to the organization.

Three forms of employee commitment, including affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment, have been proposed by [29]. Affective commitment refers to having identification, involvement, and emotional attachment in the organization. They remain because they want to. Continuance commitment refers to the employee's recognition of the costs related to leaving the organization. The normative commitment applies to the employees who stay in the organization as they feel obligated towards [29]. Encouraging employees to participate in decision

making may increase satisfaction, commitment, and trust in the management [32]. An employee with higher commitment will less likely feel the impact of stress [33]. Previous studies have shown that employee commitment is significant to organizational success, the increment of job satisfaction, lowering absenteeism, and organizational citizenship behavior [34]. Highly committed employees are stable and productive in organizational citizenship behavior. Studies also demonstrated that affective commitment and normative commitment are consistently related to work behavior [35]. Employee commitment and organizational citizenship behavior may attract positive attachments to the organization [36].

IV. TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

A transformational leader elevates followers' desires for achievement and self-development while promoting the development of groups and organizations [37]. They help their followers to achieve extraordinary performance in an organization [38]. Most importantly, they help to increase the interest of their employees by generating an understanding of the mission and vision of the group by promoting the interest of the group [39], engaging the followers toward changing the goals, value and sense of belonging until they achieve a willingness to perform beyond expectation are how transformational takes place [40]. Studies have revealed that transformational leaders are the ones who increase followers' motivation, which makes them able to transform personal values and upgrade their expectations [15], [20]. To achieve this, transformational leaders will become charismatic and inspire their followers and meet their emotional needs [39]. Inspiring, providing challenges, and creating scope for individual development are the ways for transformational leaders to motivate their employees [41].

[37] has presented a formal theory and the conceptual model of transformational leadership, which consists of idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation. The first component of transformational leadership is an individualized consideration. Individualized consideration refers to the personal consideration that gave the leader to their followers [37]. It is a unique way of treating employees based on individual needs and supporting them [42]. The transformational leaders with individualized consideration support individual needs [43], creating employees' potential [44], appreciate follower's development [45]. The second component of transformational leadership is

intellectual stimulation. Intellectual stimulation refers to the leaders who inspire the followers through a questioning of assumptions, reframing problems, and purposeful stimulation to increase intellectual curiosity [45]. According to [37], intellectual stimulation allows leaders to foster innovation, reframing new problems and approaching old situations in novel ways. Leaders who possess intellectual stimulation articulating the vision and create high expectations of the followers (Wang et al., 2013), support for innovative development [43] and encourage their followers to use their intuition as well as logic in dealing with any issues [15].The third component of transformational leadership is that idealized influence. It happens when the leaders portray themselves as notable examples by strengthening the elements of adoration, profound respect, and duplicating of followers. Transformational leaders with idealized influence gain the trust of their followers to achieve the organizational goals by aligning with the followers' goals [15], help to nurture the social identification within the organization [43], become a significant role model for their followers [40], take risks and work effectively [44]. The leaders to build the commitment among the followers, provide meaning in the lives of the employees, set a standard of excellence, and promote noble ideals. The last component is inspirational motivation. It indicates how leaders articulate a vision and make the followers increase their enthusiasm for meeting and achieving organizational challenges [45]. This component makes the leaders align the employees' goals with the organizational goal and coaching them to achieve it [15], encourage their followers to have an attractive future envisioned by themselves [46] and gain the employees' confidence to achieve the goals [42].

V. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study focuses on the relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment by highlighting the mediation role of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership plays a role as the mediator to explain the relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment. Figure 1 is the conceptual framework of this study.
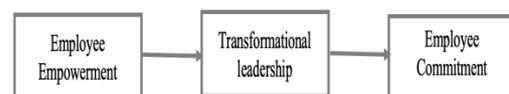

Figure 1   The conceptual framework

VI. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Empowerment is a result of an employee's psychological reflection towards the existence or non-existence of empowering conditions [47]. Empowerment is an attitude and perceptions of employees towards their job and organization based on an organizational approach whereby the administrators can provide an opportunity to empower their employees [48]. Empowered employees are likely to be committed towards the organization, and it has a significant relationship with employee commitment and turnover intention. The turnover intention reduces once the employees are committed through empowerment [49]. Studies indicate that employee empowerment contributes to managerial and organizational effectiveness and commitment and makes employees increase more responsibility towards the quality of goods and services [50].

Psychological empowerment can increase employee commitment because it provides a meaningful job that fits the personal and organizational work role and feels a sense of competency. It makes employees believe that they can perform the work role, have self-determination over the work and related decision process and feel the impact as they have possibilities to be embedded in shaping the organizational system [51]. For example, [52] have indicated that teachers' commitment increases if they psychologically perceive their school environment as bringing meaning to the work role, perceived competency in enhancing skills and competencies, have influence in strategic, administrative, and operating outcomes. Furthermore, the study done by [51] has indicated that psychological empowerment could influence all three types of commitment: continuance normative and affective. Empowerment creates the possession of decision making that leads to the increase of commitment. The study done by [53] has indicated a positive relationship between components employee empowerment and organizational commitment. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H0: There is no relationship between the employee empowerment and employee commitment

H1: There is a relationship between the employee empowerment and employee commitment

On the other hand, transformational leadership is demonstrated to be positively related to employee empowerment [12], [54] and employee commitment [55], [41]. Transformational leaders align individual goals with organizational goals by envisioning an attractive future that inspires the followers through social identification theory. They make the followers feel the consistency between their self-interest and organizational interest. Individual consideration components make the leaders give great attention to the followers and encourage them to take responsibilities, increasing the empowerment [56]. Transformational leaders increase the employee's commitment, primarily when they focus on the individual; it will likely increase the emotional or psychological attachments in the heart of the followers. Employees feel a sense of belonging to the organization.

The leaders inspire the followers to attach to the organization and make them feel happy with the organization and remain with the organization. Empowerment helps the leaders to exploit the knowledge, skills, experience, and motivation of all their personnel [54]. Employee empowerment and transformational leadership help to reduce the level of job stress [21]. A study done by [57] highlights the importance of transformational leadership in empowerment. The findings of the study suggest the managers demonstrate transformational leadership behavior to modify the work environment. As for employee commitment, a study done by [58], transformational leadership is demonstrated as the strongest contributor to organizational commitment among the nurses in Saudi Arabia. Based on previous studies, the potential of transformational leadership for both employee empowerment and commitment are undeniable. In this study, transformational leadership is proposed as a mediator in the relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment. In uncovering this perspective, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Transformational leadership mediates the relationship between the employee empowerment and employee commitment

VII. METHODOLOGY

The study employs a quantitative method that involves the use of surveys. The participants of this study are employees at Maybank, Bank Islam, Affin Bank and CiMB Bank, Tenaga Nasional Berhad, and Telekom Malaysia in Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu. The study participants had involved employees at all levels, including supporting staff, executives, and managers. The reason for including the employees at all levels is because empowering employees applied at all levels. Every individual in the organization should be equipped with the necessary skills and competency to perform their task [22]. The selected organizations are listed under the Government-linked Companies (GLCs) Transformation Program. This study involves 151 respondents using purposive sampling. Rather than focussing on the developed states in Malaysia, this study is focusing on the developing states. The stratified sampling method is used to sample the population. The population is stratified according to their stratum (organization) before the number of populations withdraw.

Measurement

Employee empowerment was measured using three types of empowerment; psychological empowerment [8], structural empowerment [12], and behavioral empowerment [25]. In measuring employees' affective commitment, three factors of organization, top management, supervisors, and the workgroup, have been identified to affect the individual commitment. Thus, the study by [59] was adopted and adapted. These factors help to increase the psychological attachment of employees towards the organization, which makes them stay. As for transformational leadership, the measurement was adopted and adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire [60]. The items were based on the component of transformational leadership as proposed by [37] which are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Analyses

Before the analysis took place, the factor analysis and parametric test have been conducted. The factor analysis indicates that the KMO is excellently good with the value of 0.906. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant (Chi-Square=3211.094, p<0.01). The normality is assumed for all variables as both skewness and kurtosis value is within the range of +1 to -1. The skewness and kurtosis for employee empowerment are -0.165 and 0.008 respectively. The skewness and kurtosis for employee commitment are -0.428 and 0.828 respectively. The skewness and kurtosis for transformational leadership are 0.008 and -0.256 respectively. The reliability is assumed for all variables as the value of Cronbach Alpha is above 0.9. Cronbach Alpha's values for employee empowerment, employee commitment and transformational leadership are 0.940, 0.913 and 0.960 respectively. The linearity of the relationship between the employee empowerment and employee commitment is also assumed as the deviation from linearity is p>0.005. The assumptions for parametric tests are assumed, hence the parametric analyses are employed in this study.

For H1, Pearson Correlation was employed to determine the relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment. For H2 the Process by Hayes was employed to examine the mediation role of transformational leadership in the relationship between the employee empowerment and employee commitment.

VIII. FINDINGS

The results of this study are divided into three sections. The first section is the Respondents' Profile of this study. The second section is result of Hypothesis 1: The relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment. The last section is result of Hypothesis 2: Transformational leadership mediates the relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment.

A. Section 1: Respondents Profile

The respondents' profile describes the background of the respondents including gender, age, status, the tenure of services and position. Table 1 shows the profile of the respondents of the study. The total population of this study is 151 employees of GLCs employed in top 20 GLCs in Kuala Terengganu.

Table 1: Respondent's Profile

Demographic Background		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	55	38.7
	Female	87	61.3

Age	20-29 Years Old	40	26.8
	30-39 Years Old	46	30.9
	40-49 Years Old	44	29.5
	50 and above Years Old	19	12.8
Status	Single	36	24.3
	Married	108	73.0
	Widowed	4	2.7
Tenure of Services	0-9 Years	54	36.0
	10-19 Years	42	28.0
	20-29 Years	35	23.3
	30-39 Years	19	12.7
Position	Executive	72	48.0
	Manager	4	2.6
	Senior Manager	1	0.7
	Others	73	48.7

The first demographic profile is gender. The gender shows that 55 (38.7%) of respondents are male, and 87 (61.3%) respondents are female. Secondly, the age shows that most respondents come from the age group of 30-39 years old with a total number of 46 (30.9 %) respondents, followed by age group of 40-49 years old with a total of 44 (29.5%) respondents, a age group of 20-29 (26.8 %) years old with a total of 40 respondents and lastly a age group of 50 years old and above with a total of 19 (12.8%) respondents. Thirdly, the marital status of the respondents shows that most of them are married with a total of 108 (73.0%) respondents, followed by single respondents with a total of 36 (24.3%) respondents and widowed is the least with a total of 4 (2.7 %) respondents. Fourthly, the tenure of the service shows that the highest is 0-9 years with a total of 54 (36 %) respondents, followed by 10-19 years with a total of 42 (28%) respondents, 20-29 years with a total of 35 (23.3%) respondents and 30-

39 years with a total of 19 (12.7 %) respondents. Lastly, the respondents' position shows that the highest comes from other positions, with a total of 73 (48.7%) respondents. Other positions of the respondents include officers and administrative support staff. The executive is the second highest, with a total of 72 (48%) respondents. The manager position is 4 (2.6%) respondents, and the senior manager is 1 (0.7%) respondents.

B. Section 2: H1: The relationship the between the employee empowerment and employee commitment

Section 2 of the findings determine the relationship between the employee empowerment and employee commitment. Table 2 shows the correlation between the employee empowerment and employee commitment. Pearson's correlation for employee empowerment and employee commitment is 0.577 and it is significance ($p<0.05$). This shows that employee empowerment and employee commitment were positively correlated. Since there is a correlation between the employee empowerment and employee commitment, the null hypothesis is rejected and H1 is accepted.

Table 2: Correlation between the employee empowerment and employee commitment

		Employee empowerment	Employee commitment
Employee empowerment	Pearson Correlation	1.00	0.577**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		114

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

C. Section 3: H2: Transformational leadership mediates the relationship between the employee empowerment and employee commitment

Section 3 of the findings examine the mediation role of transformational leadership in the relationship between the employee empowerment and employee commitment. Table 3 shows the result of Sobel Test of Hayes Regression for employee empowerment. The result of Sobel test shows that the mediation role of transformational leadership for employee

empowerment and employee commitment is significant, where the effect size is 0.1532 p<0.05.

Table 3: Sobel test for employee empowerment

Effect	Se	Z	P
0.1532	0.0444	3.4535	0.0006

b=0.5786, p=0.000

R^2= 0.5837, p=0.000

Transformational Leadership

b=0.2647, p=0.000

R^2= 0.6302, p=0.000

Employee Empowerment

Employee Commitment

b=0.4866, p=0.000
R^2 =0.5882, p=0.000
Indirect effect, b=0.1532 95% BCa CI [0.07, 0.27]
Total Effect, b=0.4866, p=0.000 BCa CI [0.37, 0.60]
Direct effect, b=0.334, BCa CI [0.20, 0.47]
Standardized indirect effect, b=0.1817, 95% BCa CI [0.08, 0.31]
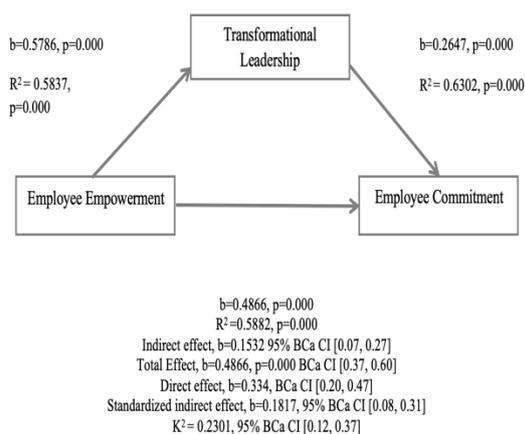K^2 = 0.2301, 95% BCa CI [0.12, 0.37]

Figure 2 Mediation role of transformational leadership between the employee empowerment and employee commitment

Figure 2 shows the mediation role of transformational leadership between the employee empowerment and employee commitment. Employee empowerment significantly predicts the transformational leadership (b=0.5786, p<0.05). The value of R2 is 0.5837 shows that employee empowerment is explained as 58.37% of the variance in transformational leadership. Employee empowerment significantly predicts employee commitment even with the transformational leadership (b=0.4866, p<0.05); transformational leadership significantly predicts the employee commitment (b=0.2647, p<0.05). The value of R^2 is 0.6302 explained as 63.02% variance in the employee commitment. Total effect model shows that when the transformational leadership is not in the model, employee empowerment significantly predicts the employee commitment (b=0.4866, p<0.05). The value of R^2 is 0.5882 explained as 58.82% variance of the transformational leadership. There is a significant indirect effect of employee empowerment on employee commitment through transformational leadership, b=0.1817, BCa CI [0.08, 0.31]. This represents a large effect,

k2=0.2301, 95% BCa CI [0.12, 0.37]. As the mediation role of transformational leadership is significantly proven, H2 is supported.

IX. DISCUSSION

The study focuses on determining the relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment as well as the mediating role transformational leadership plays in the relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment. The first finding of this study indicates a positive correlation between employee empowerment and employee commitment. This finding proves the first hypothesis of this study. The finding corroborates with the past studies done by [48], [50], [51]), [52] and [4] that there is a positive relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment. The positive relationship means that once the employee empowerment increases, employee commitment also increases. Most of the respondents of this study are the executives. The position might be why the positive relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment as possession of authority motivates employees to execute their tasks and increase their commitment. The executive level is a part of the managerial level with the authority to access the resources and information. The position may increase their commitment as they have self-determination over their job, competency, and meaning. The result is in line with [51] that employee commitment would increase through psychological empowerment as employees have meanings over their job, sense of competency, self-determination over their work, and involved in shaping the organizational system. The possession of autonomy does not only increase employee commitment but also their effectiveness in the organization.

[61] have emphasized that organizational effectiveness increases once the employees have autonomy and can make independent decisions. The positive relationship may indicate motivation because empowered employees are committed to the organization. This revelation has emphasized by [62] that employee empowerment grants employees' motivation to take action in problem-solving and to perform their duties by increasing their self-confidence, provide employees more autonomy by distancing decision-making process, sharing of knowledge and resources and redistribution of power decision-making. The possession of power in an organization, especially in the sharing of expertise, definitely influences employee commitment. [63] also explained that empowerment

reflects the inspirational work attitudes which spark enthusiasm in getting jobs done. Therefore, empowerment is essential for employee motivation for employees to become committed to the organization.

The second finding of this study has shown the mediation role of transformational leadership in the relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment. This finding is demonstrating that transformational leadership mediates the relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment. This study has supported the previous study done by [12] in which employee's empowerment (perceived competence and perceived control) is positively related to perceived organizational reputation by employees. It is also mediated the influence of transformational leadership on the perceived organizational reputation by employees. Transformational leadership is a significant mediator for empowered employees to become committed employees. This result is also in line with [54]. They highlighted that empowerment also helps the leader who wants fundamental changes in their organization to exploit the knowledge, skills, experience, and motivation of all their personnel.

As shown by [39] and [56] the transformational leaders will increase the interest of employees by meeting their followers' emotional needs and aligns individual goals with the organizational goals that can make the employees feel the consistency between self-interest and organizational interest. The leader might be necessary to empower the employees and commit them by focusing their attention in the mission and vision. The individualized consideration component of transformational leadership in which the leader has a personal focus on the individuals will make the employees psychologically attached to the organization and committed in their world. The positive influence of transformational leadership and employee commitment has supported the study was done by [42] in which transformational leadership is positively related to affect commitment. The transformational leadership makes employees have the desire to stay in the organization and normative commitments that make the employees feel obligated to work towards the organizational goals. Thus, this study proves that empowered employees need transformational leadership to build their commitment. The findings of this study contribute to add knowledge to the existing research and to explore the managerial practice of empowering employees towards commitment and the significance of transformational leadership in the organization.

X. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the relationship between employee empowerment and employee commitment and the mediation role of transformational leadership. Empowerment of employees helps transformational leaders to increase the employees' commitment. Transformational leadership is necessary to increase employees' commitment as it has components that focus on individual needs in which may lead to psychological attachments. The findings of the study also highlight the need for empowerment in increasing the commitment to developing states in Malaysia, such as Terengganu. The implication of this study can be viewed upon the managerial and theoretical perspectives. Managerially, the organization should invest in the environment and people that can empower their employees and foster the positive implementation of transformational leadership for them to be committed. Theoretically, this study has added significant knowledge by proving the functions of transformational leadership in empowering employees towards their commitment in the organization. Future studies should explore the significance of transformational leadership styles that may influence the employee's commitment to the organization and vary the focus of research in other states in Malaysia.

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