

## The Perspective and Outcomes of Leadership Style of Middle Managers in the Malaysian Army

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this research is to identify the leadership style of middle managers of Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) from the perspective of Junior Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (JNCOs) in the Malaysian Army. The research was based on post-positivist philosophy. Quantitative approach and non-experimental survey was used for the research. The data consisting of 368 respondents were collected from soldiers of rank of corporal and below i.e. JNCOs from the combat element corps of the Malaysian Army. The statistical treatment of the data obtained was done by using PLS-SEM in order to determine the plausibility of the data obtained with the hypothesized model of leadership style. This research has identified that leadership style of the SNCOs in the combat element corps consists of transactional and transformational leadership. The research also established that transformational leadership style is more significant compared to transactional leadership among SNCOs of the combat element in the Malaysian Army.

**Key words:** *Leadership Style; Transformational Leadership; Transactional Leadership*

### BACKGROUND

According to Zaleznik [1], the main concept of leadership is the mutual string between the leader and the followers within the common ethical and expressive obligations. According to Wu [2], leadership is more concerned in providing direction, aligning people, motivating and inspiring others that emphasizes on long-term outcomes. Much of these concepts of leadership studies relate to leader's characteristics and leadership styles that are applied in different situations [3]. However, Karp & Helgo [4] argued that although characteristics, styles and attributes are important in leadership study, it cannot produce an ideal leader with ideal attributes to lead an organization. It is important to note the study by Moynihan & Pandey [5] who said leadership style depends on the leader's personal attributes in the way a leader thinks, act or perceive situations. Different leadership styles in particular transactional and transformational leadership have been considered as the most influential source of effective leadership in the military organisation (Bass [6]; Curphy [7]; Yammarino & Bass, [8]). Similarly, the study by Gary, Ivey, Theresa and Kline [9] indicated that both the transformational and transactional leadership provide the ultimate leadership style of military soldiers in performing their respective

duties during peacetime and combat duties. Studies have complemented that both leadership styles are influencing factors to job performance's effectiveness [10-11]. The Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) in the military play an integral role in the Armed Forces since they are the implementers of orders and directives from their higher authorities comprising of commissioned officers [12]. Furthermore, besides being followers, they play a pivotal role in executing military missions, grooming and training of the other subordinate junior non-commissioned officers (JNCOs) in executing their role in combat duties. Both SNCOs and JNCOs' training and education for better job performance typically include people management, improving leadership style and professional skills as well as fulfilling service centric requirements and combat trainings [13]. As pointed out by Huy [14], ideas provided by middle managers are often overlooked. Therefore, it is paramount for this study to provide an outcome that would allow the top military management to shape and lead the SNCOs into a bigger role in their designation as middle managers to assist military officers in accomplishing effective job performance.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

There is a need in this study to determine the middle manager leadership styles of soldiers in the rank of Sergeant, Staff Sergeant and Warrant Officers (grouped as SNCOs) within the perspective of the lower end military organizational structure of the rank of Corporal and Lance Corporal that is grouped as JNCOs. Though the findings of the previous research and studies are as such, in the Malaysian Army environment, it is uncertain whether the same factors affecting the leadership styles adopted by the SNCOs are applicable. Hence, there is a requirement for this study to address the issue of analysing soldier's leadership style in the Malaysian Army's context. The research objective is to determine the dimensions of leadership style and its significance among the SNCOs in the combat element of the Malaysian Army. This research will determine the leadership style of Senior Non Commissioned Officers (SNCO) ie transactional or transformational leadership from the perspective of Junior Non Commissioned Officers (JNCO) in the combat element of the Malaysian Army. At such the research question for this research is which leadership style of SNCOs is most significant in the element of the Malaysian Army?

## CONCEPTUALIZING AND OPERATIONALIZING THE MEASURE OF LEADERSHIP STYLE

The Malaysian Army Command and Leadership doctrine [13] characterizes military leadership as being pushed into leadership roles by virtue of their appointment in positional authority. The military commander is primarily held responsible for the success of a mission even if he or she has to work with subordinates or group that is not his or her choice. The essence of leadership as defined earlier

is the art of influencing others to accomplish a task or mission. In the military context, leadership often associates combat performance with morale, unity and *esprit de corps* [15]. As seen during the World War II, Vietnam War or the Korean War, the best performing military units were characterized by a high level of leadership style that influenced cohesion, *esprit de corps* and morale [16]. Similarly, studies done by Bass [17] and Gal [18] identified that the critical elements of a unit in military engagement are leadership, morale and commitment.

The military doctrine classifies leadership styles into three main styles: First, the directing leadership style that provides the detailed information of how, when, who, where and what the task to be performed without taking into consideration the subordinates view [13]. This style monitors the progress of the task because the subordinates are assumed to have little knowledge, skill or experience in performing the required task. Second, the participating leadership style whereby both the leader and the subordinates work together as a team to accomplish the task. In this style, subordinates are expected to provide views and suggestions in making the decision to implement the task. This style is best suited in an environment where time is not a factor and subordinates are sufficiently able to conduct the task. Third, is the delegating leadership style which involves providing the subordinates in solving a problem or executing a task without the leader's interference [19]. This environment creates an avenue for learning where leaders and subordinates have the opportunity to share knowledge and experience. The theories and concepts of leadership style in Table 1 provide a guideline on the different definitions of leadership from the great man theories to the current contemporary practices

Author	Concept And Meaning Of Leadership Style
Yukl [20]	Leadership as "influencing task objectives and strategies, influencing commitment and compliance in task behaviour to achieve these objectives, influencing the culture of an organization".
Murphy & Cleveland [21]	Leadership relates at "the power of influence process from leaders and followers to achieve organizational objectives derived through management changes".
Hollander & Offerman [22]	Leadership as a two-way influencing relationship aimed at achieving mutual goals of the leader and the follower.
McCuen [23]	Leadership consists of knowledge and skills possessed by an individual who is employed to persuade others to achieve the objective set by the leader.
Dumdum et al. [10]	"Leadership as inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations of wants and needs, the aspiration and expectations of both leaders and followers".

Dasborough and Ashkanasy [24]	Leadership as a collective function expressed in an integrated form of the group's effort and not the sum of individual dominances and contribution reflected as their relationship.
Malaysian Army [25]	Leadership is viewed as the personality and influence exerted by the leader and the relationship between the leader and follower that is personal in nature.
Gharehbaghi & McManus [26]	Leadership as achieving objectives through energized subordinates who share their passion, vision and direction.
Canadian National Defence [12]	Leadership as the formal authority or personal attributes either directly or indirectly influencing others by means of an agreement with one's intention or a shared purpose.
The Malaysian Army [13]	Leadership as being pushed into leadership roles by virtue of their appointment in positional authority.
Erkutlu [27]	Leadership as a process of social influence as it involves establishing organizations or group's objective and encouraging their behavior towards these objectives.
Australian Defence Headquarters [28]	Leadership is defined as "the process of influencing others in order to gain their willing consent in the ethical pursuit of mission".
Wu [2]	Leadership is more concerned in providing direction, aligning people, motivating and inspiring others that emphasizes on long-term outcomes.

**Table 1: Theories and Concepts of Leadership Style**

Based on the study above, the criteria used to identify the leadership style in the Malaysian Army in this study of SNCOs performance are also hinging on the transactional and transformational perspectives. As such, it is paramount for this study to provide an outcome that would allow the top military management to shape and lead the SNCOs into a bigger role in their designation as middle managers to assist military officers in accomplishing work commitments for effective job performance.

**Transformational Leadership**

The concept of transformational leadership was first developed by James MacGregor Burns who is also known as the founder of the Transformational Leadership theory [29]. The theory of transformational leadership has been conducted by many researchers in various settings such as Burns [29], Bass [6], Hersey [30], Politis [31], Bass et al. [32], Bass & Riggio [33], Boerner et al. [34], [11], Ling, Simsek, Lubatkin and Veiga [35], Ivey and Kline [36], Wang and Howel [37] and Yulk [38]. Transformational leaders persuade their followers to make efforts for a greater mark of achievements along with greater marks of ethical views and values [39]. According to Bass & Avolio [40] transformational leadership consists of four behaviour components, namely: inspirational motivation, idealized influence, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. Kane & Tremble [41] conducted a transformational leadership study on different level of commanders of

forty one battalions. The results showed that higher hierarchy of military leaders such as battalion and company commanders have high rating for platoon commanders. This study reiterates that transformational leadership is more applicable in upper hierarchies in most organizations.

**Transactional Leadership**

Judge et al. [42] said that transactional leaders provide appropriate rewards in exchange for accomplishment of assigned tasks i.e. rewarded for accomplishment but received punishment/criticism for non-performance of task. Gary et al. [9] indicated that transactional leadership is becoming more prominent in certain militaries as the younger Generation Y joins the military. The soldier faces the challenges of a demanding job requirement, obligation to their superior, sacrifices and their commitment required by the military which require them to ensure a balance between military job performance requirements and lifestyle with family and personal needs [43]. In military service, soldiers are expected to understand that they are subjected to organizational practices, norms and values which require a high sense of obligation, loyalty and duty [44]. As such, commanders must be able to understand the true performance from their soldiers. Bass *et al.* [32] has completed a study of seventy two U.S. Army platoons at four Army posts. The study required the soldiers to distinguish between transformational and transactional leadership styles of their platoon leader and platoon sergeant. His

study found that transactional leadership is the main factor to effective leadership and is vital to effective performance. The results of the study also indicate that platoon leaders exercise transactional leadership by expressing vibrant criterions and opportunities for performance. The leaders were found to have rewarded his platoon members for achieving specific goals. They have to be prepared in all situations especially for combat that are led by leaders with different leadership style affecting their loyalty, *esprit de corps*, acting beyond the call of duty, selfless dedication, heroism, commitment and loyalty among the soldiers [45]. Similarly, Tremblay [46] pointed out that the completeness of a soldier requires their commitment to their unit which is influenced by their commanders' leadership style. It was also highlighted by Kane & Tremble [41] that leadership style has a major role in the performance of a soldier especially in the combat zone.

Transactional styles of leadership were differentiated from transformational by Burns [29], who is the founder of the Transformational Leadership theory [47]. Burns [29] said transactional leadership is the reaching out of contact with the ultimate purpose of exchanged of valued things with each other. Apart from that, Politis [31] found that transactional leaders have followers with higher confidence and therefore inspire followers to appreciate their required performance. A comparison between the two styles of leadership was aptly highlighted by Bolden *et al.* [39] as shown in Table 2. According to them, both leadership styles are essential to run an organisation. Transactional leadership has always been a model for organisations and people that have never come across the transformational concept of leadership which requires facing the challenges for a change.

<b>Transformational Leadership</b>	<b>Transactional Leadership</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds on a man's need for meaning</li> <li>• Is preoccupied with purposes and values, morals and ethics</li> <li>• Transcends daily affairs</li> <li>• Is orientated toward long-term goals without compromising human values and principles</li> <li>• Focuses more on mission and strategies</li> <li>• Releases human potential- identifying and developing new talent</li> <li>• Designs and redesigns jobs to make them meaningful and challenging</li> <li>• Aligns internal structure and systems to reinforce overarching values and goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds on man's need to get a job done and make a living</li> <li>• Is preoccupied with power and position, politics and perks</li> <li>• Is mired in daily affairs</li> <li>• Is short-term and hard data orientated</li> <li>• Focuses on tactical issues</li> <li>• Relies on human relations to lubricate human interactions</li> <li>• Follows and fulfils role expectations by striving to work effectively within current systems</li> <li>• Supports structures and systems that reinforce the bottom line, maximise efficiency and guarantee short-term profit</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Comparison of transactional and transformational leadership**

Source: Bolden, Gosling, Marturano & Dennison [39]

Both SNCOs and JNCOs' trainings and education for better job performance typically include people management, improving leadership style and professional skills as well as fulfilling service centric requirements and combat trainings [13]. Comparing the military's perspective of middle managers with that of the corporate middle managers, it could be seen that the corporate's middle managers manage first-line managers and senior individual contributors. They may also manage internal departments or functions such as marketing, human resources etc. [48]. Clearly, middle managers play vital roles as innovator and entrepreneur in proposing new possibilities that would add value to job performance in the organization. They also act as communicator in leveraging informal networking at the different levels of the multi-level organization [14]. Additionally, the middle managers also act as a

barometer in the motivational needs of the employees and senior managers for the tenuous balance between job performances.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopted the quantitative method approach and embraced the post-positivism philosophy as its philosophical paradigm. The survey research involved cross-sectional studies using a questionnaire for data collection. Items in the survey questionnaire on leadership Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire –MLQ) were adapted from other studies. The reliability and validity of the MLQ was based on studies done by Bass & Avolio [49] that showed all the transactional and transformational leadership dimensions have good internal consistency reliability with Cronbach's Apha ranging from .769 to .965. In the current

survey questionnaire, the respondents (JNCOs) were asked to describe their SNCOs commander's leadership style through a 21 questions measurement using the Multi Factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 5X-Short [40]. that used a 5-point Likert scale. The Leadership Style Questionnaire measured two leadership styles, which were transformational and transactional leadership. Each of these leadership styles consist of items measuring specific components of each style.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the pilot study, some items in the survey questionnaire were removed as their outer loadings results did not meet the Cronbach Alpha's threshold level. Only 13 items were used for the research proper for the 368 respondents. From the outcome of the pilot study, it was observed that some clarity, sequence of the questions and use of scale required amendment and has to be addressed in the actual survey. Based on these feedbacks, the researcher was able to refine further and enhance the design of

the items in the survey questionnaires for the actual survey. Items in the survey questionnaire were relabelled under its respective dimension and sub-dimensions prior to the actual survey. The relationship was investigated using PLS-SEM path model based on path analysis. The results of the PLS-SEM algorithm are as presented in Figure 1. The  $R^2$  value of 0.689 indicates that 68.9% of leadership style is predicted by the constructs of transformational and transactional leadership. The estimated path coefficients,  $\beta$ , obtained indicate standardized values between -1 and +1 representing positive and negative relationships. The results of the path coefficients indicate that transformational leadership ( $\beta = 0.536$ ) and transactional leadership ( $\beta = 0.363$ ) and have positive relationships with leadership style. The  $\beta$  values indicate that transactional leadership is a weaker indicator than transformational leadership. Hence, the results support the hypothesis that transformational leadership and transactional leadership have a positive significant relationship with leadership style among the SNCOs.

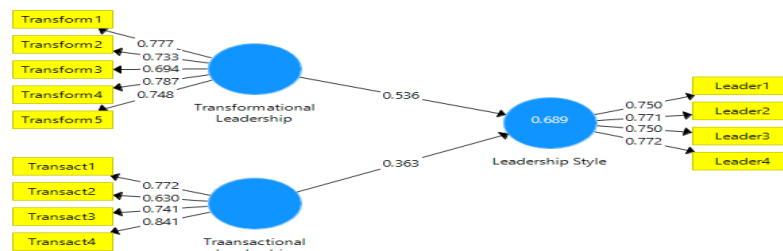


Figure 1 - PLS Algorithm of Leadership Style Model

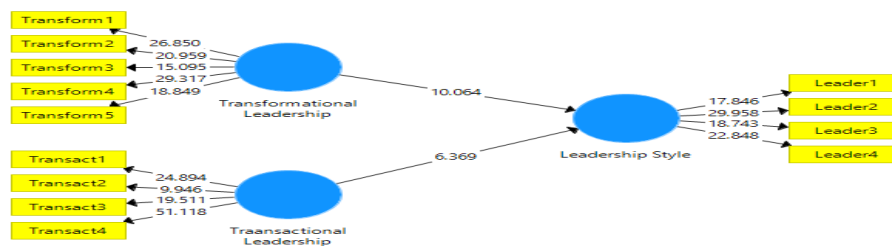


Figure 2 – Bootstrapping results of the leadership style model (>1.96)

The ultimate test to determine the significance of the coefficients was conducted by means of bootstrapping. The bootstrapping results in Figure 2 provided the standard errors and compute the empirical  $t$  values that determine whether the coefficients are significant.

The result is in line with result of the study conducted by Simon *et al.* (2014) that determined transformational leadership and transactional leadership of middle managers leadership style in

banking industry are positively related to the leader. The result also concurs with the study conducted in the Royal Malaysian Armoured Corps by Azman bin Alias [50] that there is a significant relationship whereby transformational leadership has a more positive relationship than transactional leadership. Nevertheless Gary *et al* [9] explain that transactional leadership is becoming more prominent in certain militaries as the younger Generation Y joins the military. The results in Table 3 indicates the relationship of transformational leader with

leadership style is significant with a path coefficient of 0.536 and *t* value of 10.064 which is >1.96. Similarly, the relationship of transactional

leadership style with leadership style is also significant with a path coefficient of 0.363 and *t* value of 6.369 which is >1.96.

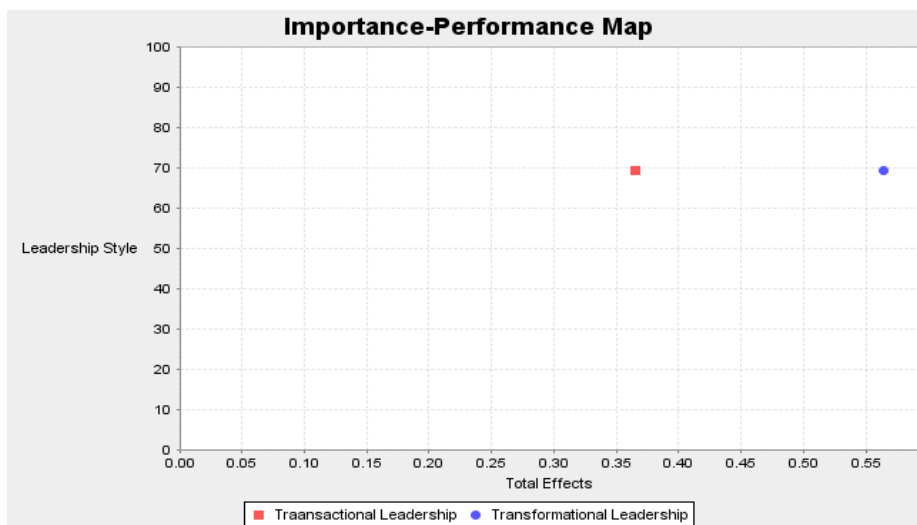
Construct	Path Coefficient	t Value (>1.96)	Construct
Transformational -> Leadership Style	0.536	10.064	Significant
Transactional -> Leadership Style	0.363	6.369	Significant

**Table 3: Significance of the relationships between Transactional and Transformational Leadership with Leadership style**

Nevertheless this results does not concur with a research [51], on determining the leadership styles of 279 Infantry commanding officers. The finding indicates that the highest mean score on leadership style was for transactional followed by transformational among the current military commanders in the Malaysian Infantry. The finding implies that although all non-commissioned officers undergo similar training, there are differences in leadership style portrayed by the various commanders i.e. SNCOs between combat support regiments in the Malaysian Army.

The importance-performance matrix analysis (IPMA) was used to extend the results of PLS-SEM by taking the performance of each construct to draw conclusions on its performance and the relative importance of constructs in explaining other constructs in the structural model of leadership style. The extension was built on the PLS-SEM estimates of the path model relationships and added an additional dimension to the analysis that considers the latent variables' average values [52]. The IPMA contrasted the leadership style structural model total effect (importance) and the average values of the latent variable scores (performance) to highlight significant areas for improvement for the leadership style of SNCOs.

Contributing towards the score of leadership style are the scores of transformational leadership with a value of 67.07 and transactional leadership with a value of 53.60. Thus, the relative performance of the two exogenous constructs is headed by transformational leadership and followed by transactional leadership. The creation of an IPMA representation of the leadership style model in the form of a graph is as shown in Figure 3. The IPMA of leadership style reveals that both transactional and transformational leadership are of similar importance for establishing leadership style of middle managers of the combat element of the Malaysian Army. The IPMA of the leadership style model provides additional information that though transactional and transformational leadership provide almost similar contribution towards the performance of leadership style, nevertheless transformational leadership is of higher relative importance in the overall measure of the leadership style. This analysis can be seen from the values of the transformational leadership (67.07) Thus, there is a need for the military to maintain the performance of both transactional and transformational leadership. Concomitantly, emphasis must also be placed in enhancing the importance of transformational leadership in order to augment the overall effectiveness of leadership style in the unit.



**Figure 3: IPMA of Leadership style Among Middle Managers in the Malaysian Army**

## CONCLUSION

Transformational and transactional leadership have a positive significant relationship with leadership style of SNCOs. Nevertheless the results attributed that SNCOs are more receptive towards transformational than transactional leadership in accordance with the rigid chain of command in the Malaysian Army. The soldiers carry out lawful command and order based on the old transformational leadership theory. They are mission oriented to attain goals needed in their job performance. Additionally, this study serves to augment knowledge of current body of empirical research, particularly the body of knowledge regarding leadership styles of SNCOs. These results will be instrumental in the Malaysian Army to study the reasons on why transformational leadership is pertinent among SNCOs. Military doctrines can be carved to assist the SNCOs in their strengths and weaknesses in their job performance. The current doctrines have to be reviewed so as to meet the current requirements especially from the view of the younger soldiers of Generation Y in the military. Leadership training has to be emphasized at all military training centres on the aspects of leadership style and organizational commitment especially in the current peace time soldiering concept which the Malaysian Army is undergoing besides the overseas assignments in the United Nation peacekeeping operations and others.

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