

The impact of transformational leadership style on employees' organizational commitment: A study at higher education institutions in Vietnam



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Abstract In the context of higher education innovation in Vietnam toward autonomy, quality, and international integration, the In the context of Vietnam's higher education reform toward greater autonomy, quality assurance, and international integration, leadership has emerged as a critical determinant of institutional success. This study investigates the influence of transformational leadership (TL) on organizational commitment (OC) among academic and administrative staff in Vietnamese higher education institutions. Drawing upon Bass and Avolio's (1995) transformational leadership framework, the research examines how the four dimensions—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—shape employees' affective attachment to their institutions. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing survey data collected from 300 respondents representing both public and non-public universities across Vietnam. The data were analyzed using reliability testing, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM) to validate the measurement model and test the hypothesized relationships. The results reveal that transformational leadership exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on employees' organizational commitment. Among the four dimensions, individualized consideration emerged as the strongest predictor of affective commitment, underscoring the importance of empathy, mentoring, and personalized support in fostering loyalty and emotional attachment among university staff. These findings highlight the emotional and relational underpinnings of commitment formation, particularly within the collectivist and high power-distance culture of Vietnam. The study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence of the applicability of transformational leadership theory in the higher education sector of an emerging economy. Practically, it suggests that fostering a transformational leadership culture—centered on individualized support and shared purpose—can enhance staff engagement and strengthen institutional cohesion in the era of educational innovation and global competition.

Keywords: academic leadership, affective commitment, emerging economy

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the period when Vietnamese higher education was being reconstructed as a whole to adapt to the needs of integrated development, current universities face numerous challenges, including reshaping the governance model of a university, enhancing the quality of teaching and research, and increasing regional competitiveness. To adjust to this, the importance of leadership, particularly middle and senior leadership within universities, is growing. Change-oriented leadership behavior, including charisma, inspiration, motivation, individualized development capacity, and innovation, is regarded as a significant determinant of employees' organizational commitment—their devotion, loyalty, and willingness to help the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Meyer & Allen, 1997). In Vietnam, studies on leadership in higher education are currently limited and are reflected primarily through university governance, leadership capability, or the effective performance of organizations. Moreover, the relationship between transformational leadership style and employees' organizational commitment—including both lecturers and administrative staff—has not yet been comprehensively and systematically studied (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). In addition, the characteristics of organizational culture, specific management structure, and transition process in the Vietnamese higher education system require in-depth studies to clearly determine the impact of leadership factors on the psychology and organizational behavior of employees.

This gap poses an urgent need for applied research on transformational leadership styles in the Vietnamese education context to improve management effectiveness and develop sustainable human resources in universities. The objective of this study is to clarify the relationship between transformational leadership style and employees' organizational commitment in higher education institutions in Vietnam. This study is expected to contribute to the theory of organizational behavior and human resource management in higher education while providing practical evidence for educational managers in designing

and implementing appropriate leadership strategies. On the basis of the established research objectives, this study focuses on clarifying five key questions to explore the relationship between transformational leadership style and employees' organizational commitment.

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1. Concept of transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that fosters positive organizational change through the ability to inspire, motivate, and promote the personal development of employees. Building upon Burns' (1978) foundational work, Bass (1985) extended the concept by suggesting that transformational leaders enhance subordinates' awareness, motivation, and performance by reshaping their value systems and goals and by aligning individual objectives with the collective goals of the organization.

Transformational leadership has been found to exert a positive influence on various organizational outcomes, including job performance, job satisfaction, loyalty, and organizational commitment (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Particularly in the current educational context, transformational leadership is considered one of the most effective leadership styles, as it meets the demands for creativity, dedication, and long-term commitment to the organization.

2.2. Concept of organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is reflected through the acceptance of organizational values, the willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization, and the pride associated with being a member of the organization. It represents the psychological bond that unifies individual and organizational goals (Porter et al., 1974). According to Meyer and Allen (1991), organizational commitment comprises three core components: (1) affective commitment, (2) normative commitment, and (3) continuance commitment. These components reflect different motivational bases underlying the individual–organization relationship and help managers better understand why employees choose to stay with or leave an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997). In the context of education, Bentein et al. (2005) emphasized that organizational commitment contributes to maintaining a stable workforce and fostering long-term dedication among employees within educational institutions.

2.3. Previous studies

Owing to its role in inspiring intrinsic motivation and fostering personal development, transformational leadership is considered one of the key factors positively influencing employees' organizational commitment (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Avolio et al., 2004). For example, a study conducted in primary and secondary schools in Tanzania revealed that principals' transformational leadership had a significant effect on teachers' organizational citizenship behavior and job satisfaction (Nguni et al., 2006). Similarly, Bogler (2001) indicated that positive leadership behaviors from school administrators significantly influenced teachers' perceptions and enhanced their organizational commitment in Israeli secondary schools.

In studies conducted in Africa, trust and leadership have been identified as mediating mechanisms through which transformational leadership influences employee commitment (Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003). In addition, Judge and Piccolo (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 87 studies and confirmed that transformational leadership is significantly correlated with organizational commitment and job performance. In the context of Vietnam, Nguyen (2020) conducted a survey at public universities in Ho Chi Minh City and reported that two components—inspirational motivation and individualized consideration—significantly impacted lecturers' commitment to their organizations. Similarly, study by Nguyen and Hoa (2021) revealed that affective commitment and normative commitment play a positive role in strengthening the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment within the university environment.

However, current research still presents several gaps. First, studies that analyze each component of transformational leadership—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—and their specific impacts on different types of organizational commitment, namely, affective, normative, and continuance commitment, are lacking. Second, in the context of Vietnamese higher education, which is currently facing pressures of reform and international integration, there remains limited empirical research on the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. These two gaps highlight the necessity of conducting quantitative studies that specifically explore the development of transformational leadership within higher education under current contextual conditions.

2.4. A synthesis of empirical studies on the relationship between leadership and organizational commitment

In previous studies, numerous scholars have shown significant interest in examining the relationship between leadership styles and organizational commitment within the fields of management and organizational behavior. In particular, empirical research has consistently demonstrated a positive impact of transformational leadership on employees' levels of organizational commitment across various contexts. For instance, Meyer and Allen (1997) reported that the psychological bond between employees and their organization is reflected through their desires, loyalty, and willingness to contribute. Similarly, Meyer and

Herscovitch (2001) suggested that when employees receive support from their leaders, it substantially enhances their affective attachment and sense of obligation to the organization.

Furthermore, Avolio et al. (2004) reported that transformational leadership behaviors help employees gain a stronger sense of their personal role within the organization, thereby strengthening both affective and normative commitment. In a meta-analysis of over 87 studies, Judge and Piccolo (2004) concluded that transformational leadership is strongly and positively correlated with organizational commitment, even more so than transactional leadership is. This underscores the effectiveness of transformational leadership—with its four core components, i.e., idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—in fostering employee commitment to the organization.

In the field of education, numerous empirical studies have demonstrated the positive influence of leadership—particularly transformational leadership—on organizational commitment. For instance, Nguni et al. (2006) conducted a study in secondary schools in Tanzania and reported that transformational leadership had a significant positive effect on both teachers’ commitment and job performance. In Israel, Bogler (2001) reported that positive leadership practices by school principals enhanced teachers’ perceptions of organizational commitment. Similarly, in Vietnam, Nguyen and Nguyen (2020) indicated that transformational leadership in higher education institutions positively influences faculty members’ loyalty and long-term commitment intentions. The aggregation of these empirical findings suggests that the relationship between leadership and organizational commitment holds not only statistical significance but also practical relevance, particularly in the context of human resource management. Notably, in the current educational landscape, transformational leadership plays a crucial role in sustaining a dedicated and committed workforce, which is essential for the ongoing development and delivery of high-quality education and the training of human capital for society.

2.5. Research model and hypotheses

On the basis of the theory of transformational leadership by Bass and Avolio (1994) and the three-component model of organizational commitment by Meyer and Allen (1991), the research model is proposed as follows Figure 1:

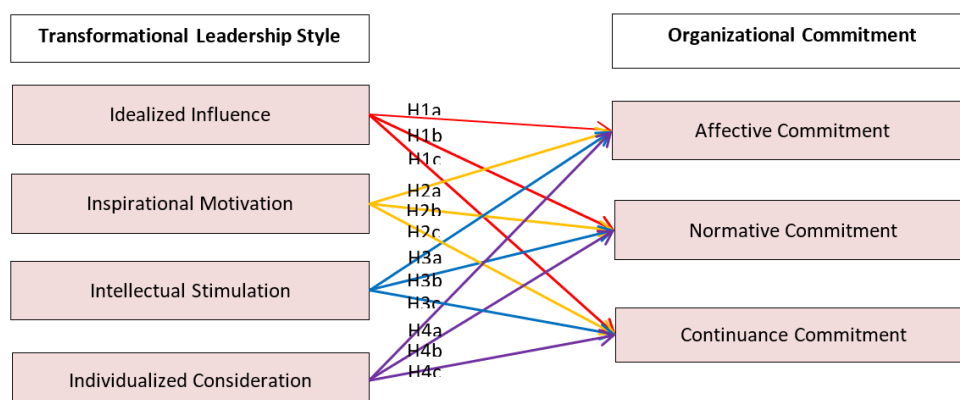


Figure 1 Research model by the authors.

Hypotheses about the influence of transformational leadership components on organizational commitment:

- H1a: Idealized influence has a positive effect on affective commitment.
- H1b: Idealized influence has a positive effect on normative commitment.
- H1c: Idealized influence has a positive effect on continuance commitment.
- H2a: Inspirational motivation has a positive effect on affective commitment.
- H2b: Inspirational motivation has a positive effect on normative commitment.
- H2c: Inspirational motivation has a positive effect on continuance commitment.
- H3a: Intellectual stimulation has a positive effect on affective commitment.
- H3b: Intellectual stimulation has a positive effect on normative commitment.
- H3c: Intellectual stimulation has a positive effect on continuance commitment.
- H4a: Individualized consideration has a positive effect on affective commitment.
- H4b: Individualized consideration has a positive effect on normative commitment.
- H4c: Individualized consideration has a positive effect on continuance commitment.

3. Research methods

This study employs a quantitative research method to explore and measure the relationship between transformational leadership style and organizational commitment among employees in higher education institutions in Vietnam. The authors adopt a quantitative approach to operationalize the concepts of transformational leadership and organizational commitment via standardized and reliable measurement scales that have been validated in numerous previous studies (Bass & Avolio, 1995;

Meyer & Allen, 1997). This approach also enables the testing of research hypotheses through empirical data, thereby allowing for generalizable conclusions (Creswell, 2014).

In this study, data were collected via a structured questionnaire comprising two main sections: the first section gathered demographic information, whereas the second section focused on measuring the key research constructs. All observed variables were assessed via a 5-point Likert scale. Specifically, the measurement of transformational leadership was adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (1995), which encompasses four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Moreover, organizational commitment was measured via the three-component model proposed by Meyer and Allen (1997), which includes (1) affective commitment, (2) normative commitment, and (3) continuance commitment.

4. Results and analysis

4.1. Descriptive analysis

The authors collected data through direct questionnaires and Google Forms from 360 lecturers and administrative staff at several public and private higher education institutions in Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and Can Tho. After data validation, only 300 questionnaires met the requirements.

Table 1 shows that the majority (45%) of participants belong to the age group from 30 to under 40 years, followed by the group from 40 to under 50 years (25%). With respect to education, 50% of the participants had a master’s degree, and 30% were PhD holders. The majority had work experience ranging from 5 to under 10 years (40%). Notably, 70% of the participants came from public institutions, and 75% were lecturers. This suggests that the survey sample is relatively representative of professional staff in higher education environments.

Table 1 Participants’ demographics.

Demographics	Classification	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	120	40.0
	Female	180	60.0
Ages	Under 30 years old	45	15.0
	From 30 to under 40 years old	135	45.0
	From 40 to under 50 years old	75	25.0
	50 years old and above	45	15.0
Education levels	Bachelor	60	20.0
	Master	150	50.0
	Doctor	90	30.0
Work experience	Under 5 years	75	25.0
	From 5 to under 10 years	120	40.0
	10 years and above	105	35.0
Type of university	Public	210	70.0
	Private	90	30.0
Job position	Lecturer	225	75.0
	Administrative staff	75	25.0

The descriptive statistics results (see Table 2) show that employees rate the transformational leadership style relatively highly, with average scores ranging from 3.67 to 3.90 on a 5-point scale. Among them, the “Idealized Influence” factor has the highest average score (Mean = 3.90), indicating that the leader has a positive influence on vision and values. Conversely, “Individualized Consideration” has a lower average (Mean = 3.67), reflecting the difference in perceptions of how the leader focuses on the individual needs of employees.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of the variables.

Measurement variables	Code	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Idealized Influence	II	3.90	0.72	2	5
Inspirational Motivation	IM	3.85	0.78	1	5
Intellectual Stimulation	IS	3.73	0.82	1	5
Individualized Consideration	IC	3.67	0.91	1	5
Affective Commitment	AC	4.02	0.66	2	5
Normative Commitment	NC	3.58	0.80	1	5
Continuance Commitment	CC	3.25	0.88	1	5

With respect to organizational commitment, employees show the highest level of affective commitment (mean = 4.02), indicating that they have an emotional attachment to the organization. In contrast, "Continuance Commitment" has a lower average score (mean = 3.25), implying that continuing to work may not stem entirely from intrinsic motivation.



4.2. Scale reliability assessment

The reliability test results of the measurement scales via the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient (see Table 3) revealed that all the variable groups achieved an acceptable level of reliability ($\alpha > 0.7$). Specifically, transformational leadership style scales such as “Inspirational Motivation” ($\alpha = 0.847$), “Intellectual Stimulation” ($\alpha = 0.823$), and “Idealized Influence” ($\alpha = 0.812$) showed high reliability. With respect to the organizational commitment factors, the “Affective Commitment” scale reached $\alpha = 0.872$, indicating very good internal consistency. Moreover, “Continuance Commitment” had an α coefficient of 0.791, which is an acceptable level, but each variable could be reviewed to ensure suitability. Overall, all scales are eligible for inclusion in exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

Table 3 Scale reliability assessment.

Scale	Number of variables	Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient	Note
Idealized Influence	4	0.812	Meet the requirements
Inspirational Motivation	4	0.847	Very good
Intellectual Stimulation	4	0.823	Very good
Individualized Consideration	4	0.802	Meet the requirements
Emotional Attachment	4	0.872	Very good
Normative Attachment	4	0.834	Very good
Continuance Attachment	4	0.791	Acceptable
Idealized Influence	4	0.812	Meet the requirements

4.3. Confirmatory factor analysis

The data in Table 4 indicate that the CFA model has a good fit with the survey data.

Table 4 Model fit test.

Index	Achieved value	Acceptance threshold	Evaluation
Chi-square/df (CMIN/df)	1.92	< 3	Good
GFI (Goodness-of-fit Index)	0.91	≥ 0.90	Achieved
TLI (Tucker–Lewis Index)	0.95	≥ 0.90	Good
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	0.96	≥ 0.90	Good
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	0.045	< 0.08	Good

The results in Table 5 show that all the variables have standardized regression weights > 0.7 , indicating good convergence.

Table 5 Standardized regression weights.

Scale	Variable Code	Weight	Conclusion
Idealized Influence	II1	0.78	Met requirements
	II2	0.84	Met requirements
Inspirational Motivation	IM1	0.80	Met requirements
	IM2	0.76	Met requirements
Intellectual Stimulation	IS1	0.79	Met requirements
	IS2	0.82	Met requirements
Individualized Consideration	IC1	0.75	Met requirements
	IC2	0.81	Met requirements
Affective Commitment	AC1	0.86	Met requirements
	AC2	0.83	Met requirements
Normative Commitment	NC1	0.79	Met requirements
	NC2	0.82	Met requirements
Continuance Commitment	CC1	0.72	Met requirements
	CC2	0.74	Met requirements

Table 6 shows that $CR > 0.7$ and $AVE > 0.5$, meet the requirements for composite reliability and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010). The CFA results show that the measurement model has a good fit with the actual data ($CFI = 0.96$, $RMSEA = 0.045$). The standardized regression weights of the observed variables are all greater than 0.7, confirming the convergence of the scale. *In addition*, the AVE and CR values both exceed the recommended thresholds ($AVE > 0.5$ and $CR > 0.7$), ensuring the composite reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, the CFA model is validated and qualified to be included in the structural equation modeling (SEM) test.



Table 6 Test of composite reliability and convergent validity.

Scale	CR (Composite Reliability)	AVE (Average Variance Extracted)	Conclusion
Transformational Leadership	0.89	0.64	Achieved
Organizational Commitment	0.91	0.68	Achieved

4.4. Structural equation modeling (SEM) test

The values in Table 7 show that the SEM has a good fit with the actual data.

Table 7 Overall fit of the SEM.

Index	Achieved value	Acceptable threshold	Evaluation
Chi-square/df (CMIN/df)	2.01	< 3	Good
GFI (Goodness-of-fit Index)	0.90	≥ 0.90	Achieved
TLI (Tucker–Lewis Index)	0.94	≥ 0.90	Good
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	0.95	≥ 0.90	Good
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	0.048	< 0.08	Good

The SEM structural model was tested and showed a good fit with the survey data. Indices such as CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, and RMSEA = 0.048 are all within the acceptable threshold, confirming the reliability of the measurement and structural models. In terms of content, the results show that transformational leadership has a positive and statistically significant effect on all three aspects of organizational commitment, with the strongest effect on affective commitment ($\beta = 0.52, p < 0.001$), indicating a strong and practically significant relationship. The impacts on normative commitment and continuance commitment were also confirmed, but the intensity of the impact was lower, especially for continuance commitment ($\beta = 0.19$). This reflects that employees are attached to the organization mainly by emotions and belief in leadership rather than by compulsory factors or by maintaining benefits. These results provide empirical evidence that transformational leadership is a key factor in enhancing employee commitment to the university, especially through inspiring, supporting personal development, and demonstrating a strategic vision (Table 8).

Table 8 Hypothesis testing.

Hypotheses	Relationships Tested	Standardized coefficient (β)	p value	Conclusions
H1	Transformational Leadership → Affective Commitment (AC)	0.52	<0.001	Supported
H2	Transformational Leadership → Normative Commitment (NC)	0.41	<0.001	Supported
H3	Transformational Leadership → Continuance Commitment (CC)	0.19	0.021	Weakly supported
H4	Affective Commitment → Overall Organizational Commitment	0.70	<0.001	Strongly supported
H5	Normative Commitment → Overall Organizational Commitment	0.45	<0.001	Supported
H6	Continuance Commitment → Overall Organizational Commitment	0.18	0.037	Weakly supported

Table 9 shows that all scales have Cronbach’s alpha values > 0.7, ensuring high internal reliability (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 9 Scale Reliability.

Measurement scale	Number of observed variables	Cronbach’s Alpha	Conclusion
Transformational leadership	8	0.902	Very good
Affective Commitment (AC)	3	0.864	Good
Normative Commitment (NC)	3	0.841	Good
Continuance Commitment (CC)	3	0.790	Acceptable
Overall organizational commitment	9	0.911	Very good

Table 10 shows that CR > 0.7 and AVE > 0.5 correspond to the scale having good composite reliability and convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The square root of the AVE is greater than the correlation coefficient, indicating that the variables ensure discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results of the reliability and validity tests of the scale show that the research model fully meets the necessary criteria. All the scales have Cronbach’s alpha values >0.7 and composite reliability values >0.8, indicating



high reliability. Moreover, all the AVE values exceed the threshold of 0.5, confirming the convergent validity of the measured concepts. In addition, the comparison results of the square root of the AVE with the correlation coefficients between the variables show that discriminant validity is ensured (Table 11). Thus, the scales in the model are all of good quality and are suitable for SEM analysis and hypothesis testing.

Table 10 Composite reliability and convergent validity.

Scale	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Conclusion
Transformational Leadership	0.91	0.64	Met requirements
Affective Commitment	0.87	0.69	Met requirements
Normative Commitment	0.85	0.66	Met requirements
Continuance Commitment	0.79	0.58	Met requirements
Overall Organizational Commitment	0.93	0.71	Met requirements

Table 11 Comparison of the square root of the AVE with the correlations between variables.

Variable pairs	√AVE (diagonal)	Correlation Coefficient	Discriminant Validity achieved?
Transformational Leadership – AC	0.80 vs 0.52	0.52	Achieved
Transformational Leadership – NC	0.80 vs 0.41	0.41	Achieved
AC – NC	0.83 vs 0.45	0.45	Achieved
AC – CC	0.83 vs 0.38	0.38	Achieved

5. Discussion

5.1. Explanation of statistically significant results

The results of the structural model analysis indicate that transformational leadership has a positive and statistically significant effect on all three components of organizational commitment, namely, affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment. Among these, the strongest relationship was found between transformational leadership and affective commitment ($\beta = 0.52, p < 0.001$). This suggests that when leaders demonstrate a clear strategic vision, inspire others, and show genuine concern for the personal development of their employees, employees are more likely to develop positive emotional bonds, take pride in their affiliation, and express a desire for long-term commitment to the organization.

Furthermore, transformational leadership has a substantial influence on normative commitment ($\beta = 0.41$) and continuance commitment ($\beta = 0.19$). These findings imply that leaders who focus on instilling trust, values, and intrinsic motivation in employees not only enhance emotional commitment but also foster a sense of ethical responsibility (normative commitment) and encourage the calculated consideration of long-term benefits in maintaining the relationship with the organization (continuance commitment).

In summary, transformational leadership plays a critical role not only in fostering emotional attachment but also in cultivating organizational commitment on the basis of ethical norms and rational evaluation. This, in turn, contributes to the stability and sustainability of the organizational workforce.

5.2. Comparison with previous studies

The findings of the present study are fully consistent with those of prior research, both within and beyond the field of education. Specifically, the results align with those of the study by Bass and Avolio (1994), which identified key characteristics of transformational leadership, such as inspirational motivation, vision articulation, and emphasis on individual development, indicating that this leadership style positively influences employees' organizational attitudes and behaviors. Similarly, the current findings support the conclusions of Judge and Piccolo (2004), whose meta-analysis emphasized that transformational leadership enhances not only job satisfaction but also organizational commitment.

In agreement with Berson and Linton (2005), this study affirms that in knowledge-based organizations such as universities, transformational leadership plays a critical role in promoting work performance and fostering deep connections between employees and the organization through the dissemination of shared values, long-term developmental goals, and encouragement of innovation.

In the context of Vietnam, where the environment is rapidly evolving and increasingly challenging, transformational leadership is not merely a supportive factor but also a strategic driver, contributing to the development of a sustainable organizational culture and promoting long-term employee engagement. These findings also align with the research of Nguyen Van Dung et al. (2021), who reported that the leadership style of academic administrators significantly influences the commitment levels of faculty and staff at public universities, particularly during the transition to autonomous governance in higher education.

5.3. Discussion in the context of Vietnamese higher education

In the context of Vietnam's higher education system transitioning toward institutional autonomy, innovation, and global integration, leadership practices play a pivotal role in shaping both organizational strategy and employee commitment. The present study's findings confirm that transformational leadership (TL) positively and significantly influences organizational commitment (OC) among lecturers and administrative staff, supporting the argument that leadership behaviors grounded in vision, trust, and individualized care can enhance employees' emotional attachment and loyalty to their institutions. These results are consistent with previous international studies emphasizing the crucial link between transformational leadership and organizational commitment in educational contexts. For instance, Kim and Yoon (2025), in *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, found that transformational leaders promote employees' affective commitment by inspiring a shared sense of purpose and fostering intrinsic motivation. Similarly, Alharbi et al. (2024) highlighted that the relational and supportive nature of transformational leadership enhances employees' psychological connection with their organization, particularly in collectivist Asian cultures. The current study reinforces these findings while extending their applicability to Vietnam's higher education system—an environment characterized by hierarchical governance traditions and a growing demand for institutional agility.

Compared with earlier research conducted in Western contexts (e.g., Avolio et al., 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2008), the present results reveal nuanced cultural and contextual variations. Specifically, while inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation remain significant predictors of commitment, individualized consideration emerged as the strongest determinant of affective commitment among Vietnamese respondents. This finding suggests that in a collectivist and high power-distance culture, leaders who demonstrate empathy, provide personal guidance, and respect individual dignity foster deeper emotional bonds than those who rely solely on vision or intellectual challenge. This aligns with Nguyen and Pham (2024), who observed that emotional reciprocity and moral leadership are critical to sustaining engagement and trust within Vietnamese universities. From a practical standpoint, these insights suggest that Vietnamese university leaders should cultivate transformational behaviors that integrate strategic vision with compassion, focusing on mentoring, recognition, and meaningful communication. By doing so, they can strengthen employees' affective commitment, reduce turnover intentions, and build cohesive institutional cultures that support innovation and academic excellence.

In theoretical terms, this research extends transformational leadership theory into an emerging, transitional educational context, confirming its cross-cultural robustness while revealing culturally contingent mechanisms. The prominence of individualized consideration in Vietnam's higher education illustrates that leadership influence is both universal and context-dependent—its success shaped by the interplay between organizational transformation and the deep-seated cultural values of respect, harmony, and belonging.

6. Conclusions

The research results indicate that transformational leadership style has a positive and statistically significant effect on all three forms of organizational commitment among employees in higher education institutions, including affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment. Among these factors, the impact on affective commitment is the strongest, reflecting the role of emotional factors and spiritual companionship between leaders and employees in maintaining a strong bond with the organization. This research contributes to confirming the practical value of transformational leadership theory in the field of higher education in Vietnam while also providing empirical evidence supporting the application of this leadership style as a tool to increase staff engagement in the context of educational innovation.

This research has expanded the scope of application of transformational leadership theory to the context of Vietnamese higher education, where corresponding empirical studies are lacking. The results further strengthen the theoretical basis for the mediating role of emotional factors (affective commitment) in maintaining organizational connection, contributing to the development of the organizational commitment theoretical framework in the public-education environment. For university leaders, it is necessary to proactively apply a transformational leadership style: inspire, encourage innovation, care about personal development, and build a shared vision; at the same time, training programs on transformational leadership skills for middle and senior management within the university system should be designed. For human resource management, it is necessary to encourage the development of a work environment on the basis of shared values, respect, and trust, to increase the level of affective and normative commitment of employees to the organization. In addition, periodic assessment tools must be used to measure the level of engagement and thereby adjust management strategies accordingly. Furthermore, the research results can serve as a reference in the process of developing policies to improve the quality of human resources in public and autonomous universities in Vietnam. Promoting transformational leadership will contribute to improving operational efficiency, training quality, and organizational image in the context of increasingly fierce competition among universities for high-quality human resources.

Although the study has achieved its objectives and provided many valuable results, certain limitations still exist: (1) Limitations regarding the survey sample: the survey sample focused mainly on several Vietnamese universities, which may

affect the generalizability of the results to the entire higher education system nationwide; (2) Intermediate or moderating variables were not considered: the research model is still simple and does not consider mediating factors such as job satisfaction, trust in leadership, or moderating variables such as organizational culture or individual characteristics.

On the basis of the limitations mentioned above, further research directions can focus on the following: First, expanding the geographical scope and types of organizations: future research should expand the survey to universities in different regions, including private universities, international universities, and colleges, to increase the representativeness and generalizability of the results. Second, adding mediating and moderating variables to the model: Further studies can integrate factors such as job satisfaction, perceptions of fairness, perceived organizational support, or trust in leadership to clarify the influence mechanism of leadership style on organizational commitment.

Acknowledgment

We would like to express our special thanks to the administrative panel of Thu Dau Mot University for creating conditions for us to perform this study. We also appreciate the enthusiastic participation of the respondents. Owing to their time and willingness, we can collect valid and reliable data for the discussion of the research issue.

Ethical considerations

This research adhered to ethical principles to ensure the integrity, confidentiality, and well-being of all participants. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before data collection, ensuring that they understood the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were protected by anonymizing responses and securely storing data. Additionally, the research strived for objectivity, avoiding biases in data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

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