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Organisational culture mediates transformational leadership and organisational commitment in internationalised private universities

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Abstract

Internationalisation of higher education has a high priority; however, private universities encounter problems in synchronising their internal organisational factors with internationalisation. This study aimed to explore the effect of transformational leadership on organisational commitment with organisational culture as a mediating variable in the framework of internationalised higher education institutions. A cross-sectional quantitative design was utilised, whereby data were gathered from 388 academic and administrative staff of internationalised higher education institutions. Subsequently, the relationship between the variables was studied using SEM. It was found that transformational leadership is a significant positive influencing factor of organisational culture and organisational commitment. Besides, organisational culture is much influenced by organisational commitment, which also mediates the relationship between commitment and transformational leadership partially. It was also highlighted that transformational leadership had both indirect and direct impact on employee commitment through the organisational culture. Linking leadership practices to a culture that supports staff engagement and promotes the continuity and effectiveness of internationalisation efforts in HEIs is essential.

1. Introduction

The expanding globalization has greatly altered higher education systems, with internationalisation being among the strategic agendas of universities around the world. At a broad level, the integration of intercultural, international, and global dimensions into the higher education defines internationalisation (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Marinoni & Pina Cardona, 2024). Additionally, it is also considered a key determinant in the competitiveness and sustainability of institutions. Subsequently, universities are involved in international partnerships, cross-border education, and student mobility programmes that help to improve their global presence and academic reputation. These understandings show that for successful globalization, organizational dynamics play a critical role.

Internationalisation strategies are more challenging for private higher education institutions. These institutions typically have less access to funding, less stable funding structures than public universities, and less global networking (Levy, 2018). Empirical research indicates that often such barriers lead to a lack of strategic direction, staff engagement and fragmented internationalisation strategies (De Wit et al., 2015; Marginson, 2016). However, the institutional policy is not the only factor influencing the success of the internationalisation programme. Willingness of academic and administrative staff to actively engage in internationalisation initiatives is also important (Jones et al., 2015). This highlighted the need to explore the organizational internal actors affecting employee engagement and institutional effectiveness.

Within this context, leadership is considered one of the important aspects influencing the success of an organization. Among the different leadership styles, transformational leadership is considered quite capable for its capability to inspire and motivate employees, thereby shaping them. Transformational leadership has components: intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Studies show that transformational leaders contribute to organizational change, employee engagement and innovation (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Ng, 2017). This leadership approach is especially applicable in higher education settings, where institutions are facing challenges related to internationalisation and global competition.

Organisational commitment is one of the outcomes of effective leadership. Organisational commitment is considered as a continuance, affective, and normative commitment, which is conceptualised under the Three-Component Model (TCM) (Solinger et al., 2008). The employees who are engaged more likely to participate in collaborative exercises and to help their institutions make changes. Thereby, commitment is an attachment of employees to their organisations, which is psychological. Increased job performance, lowered turnover intentions, and increased support for organisational initiatives are associated to higher levels of organisational commitment over the years (Guzeller & Celiker, 2020; Mosadeghrad et al., 2008). Thereby, it helps implement international plans effectively for internationalised Higher Education.

Organisational culture is associated with organisational behaviour and effectiveness by its contribution of leadership and commitment. It entails values, beliefs, and norms that are shared and guide behaviour within an organization (Schein, 2010). Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) framework outlines four types of culture that can be found in organisations: clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy, and each of these has a characteristic dimension that can affect how the organisation operates (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). The framework has been found to have a strong effect on employee attitudes, innovation, and performance within an organisation. Therefore, nurturing and adapting culture is crucial in internationalised higher education institutions to ensure openness to change, cross-cultural cooperation and engagement.

Although the concepts of transformational leadership, organisational commitment and organisational culture have been studied extensively, these constructs have been studied separately. Transformational leaders are capable of influencing the culture of an organization through their emphasis on shared values, encouraging teamwork, and developing a culture that is encouraging to innovation (Ng, 2017). Additionally, studies also indicate that organisational culture can be a significant channel for leadership to affect employee performance (Hasibuan, 2022). Therefore, a positive organisational culture can then positively influence the emotional relationship of employees within the universities, consequently increasing the commitment of the teachers to the universities. However, mediation between internationalisation and private higher education institutions is still lacking. It is especially important in the context of the growing focus on internationalization. Most institutions place greater emphasis on partnerships and international programmes with external bodies whilst neglecting to develop internal organisational factors. Hence, it is crucial to have a detailed knowledge of the interaction among these variables to be able to create integrated and effective institutional strategies. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the effect of transformational leadership on organisational commitment with organisational culture as a mediating variable in the framework of internationalised higher education institutions.

RQ: How does transformational leadership influence the internationalisation of private universities through organisational commitment and organisational culture?

The study was designed quantitatively with a cross-sectional research design with the aim of attaining the above objective. Academic and administrative personnel from higher education institutions that are actively involved in practices associated with internationalisation were targeted. Existing scales were used, such as the transformational leadership scale, TCM, and the Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI).

Leadership, culture, and commitment are essential in securing sustainable internationalisation in higher education institutions in the current globalised world. This study will contribute to the understanding of the

complex interrelationships between these critical organisational factors. It would offer a more holistic view of organisational dynamics among internationalised higher education. Furthermore, it added to the gap on the intervening effect of organizational culture. From a practical perspective, the results would provide important inputs to university leaders and policy makers, highlighting the significance of building the relationship between organisational culture and leadership practices to boost employee commitment and drive better outcomes for internationalisation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was based on three theoretical frameworks: transformational leadership theory, organisational commitment theory, and organisational culture theory. Finally, transformational leadership theory is especially important in a dynamic environment like higher education, where adaptability and innovation are important. It entailed how leaders can inspire followers to increase their motivation and performance by sharing their vision of the organisation with them (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Secondly, organizational commitment theory suggests that employees' psychological commitment to the organisation is a primary motivation to stay (Cohen, 2014). It entails the psychological attachment to the organisation as the first motivation for retention. Finally, organisational culture theory emphasizes the importance of shared values and assumptions in shaping the organisation's behaviour. Moreover, culture is a social control mechanism that can affect the meaning employees give to the actions of leaders and the organisation's goals. Organisational culture theory emphasizes the importance of shared values and assumptions in influencing the behavior of the organization (Schein, 2010). The integration of the theories together offered a solid basis for the study of how leadership can impact commitment at the cultural level.

2.2 Transformational Leadership

Leadership style has become a popular research area that focuses on the ability of leaders to create organisational change and engage employees. The dimensions of the leadership as a whole empower leaders to motivate followers, break down the norm, and be supportive (Bass & Riggio, 2006). According to Judge and Piccolo (2004), follower performance, motivation, and satisfaction were all strongly correlated with transformational leadership. Furthermore, the leadership style has a major influence on school reform, according to Leithwood and Jantzi (2005). Additionally, the leadership style improves organizational and individual performance in a variety of contexts (Gang Wang et al., 2011). Additionally, Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009) demonstrated that this leadership style increases employees' intrinsic drive, which benefits organizational innovation. According to research, university administrators who use transformational approaches are more successful in managing change and fostering innovation (Marlia et al., 2025). Because of this complexity, transformational leadership is even more crucial for higher education in the context of internationalisation.

Empirical studies in recent times are still reinforcing the pertinence of transformational leadership in organisations. Hoch et al. (2018) found that the leadership style has a strong relationship with employee outcomes, regardless of other more current forms of leadership like ethical and servant leadership. Similarly, the leadership style has a significant impact on organisational commitment and job satisfaction which are

followers' attitudes (Baptiste, 2019). Nguyen (2023) identified the positive influence of the leadership style on faculty's engagement in higher education and the institution's effectiveness. In recent years, Notarnicola et al. (2024) demonstrated that transformational leadership positively affects adaptability and Innovation, which are essential skills for institutions operating in an international context. However, these evidences are drawn from different organizational setting thereby their finding might not be exclusively applicable to the education setting.

2.3 Understanding Organisational Commitment

Organisational commitment is an important factor of organisational behaviour and organisational effectiveness. The importance of this aspect in predicting job outcomes is supported by extensive empirical research. Organisational commitment has a a negative relation to withdrawal behaviours of employees while a positive relation with job satisfaction (Ntisa, 2015). Academic staff who are committed to their institutions are more inclined to participate in teaching, research and administrative duties (Rowley & Sherman, 2003). Within this context, commitment is an important factor behind the success of change initiatives within organisations, such as internationalization. Mercurio (2015) noted that affective commitment is most significant in predicting employee behaviors. This was followed by a rethinking of commitment as an aspect which is unidirectional (Klein et al., 2019) which did not negate the applicability of the TCM approach. In the higher education context, Kılınç et al. (2024) concluded that leadership support and institutional culture play a very strong role in academic staff commitment. Further, Kim et al. (2020) showed that employee engagement is significantly impacted by organizational commitment and their involvement in institutional programs, such as international programs. This information is valuable for increasing the understanding of the development of commitment in complex institutional settings.

There is a large amount of research confirming that transformational leadership is capable of influencing organisational commitment. Studies reported that transformational leadership increases employees' emotional connection through trust and alignment with the organisation's objectives (Demir, 2008). For their part, Ismail and Mydin (2019) found that transformational leaders could boost follower commitment through the facilitation of intrinsic motivation. The results indicate that psychological attachment to the organisation can be enhanced through leader inspiration and support. Thus, empirical studies agree, revealing that transformational leaders have an impact on organisational values and norms. Organisational commitment is also important however, it is influenced by various variable in most cases being studied without considering contextual factors like organisational culture. This information is valuable for increasing the understanding of the development of commitment in complex institutional settings. Thus, a study of the potential mediators between variables is important to further develop theory and practice.

2.4 Understanding Organisational Culture

Organisational culture is among the major factors impacting on organisational behaviour and performance. Schein (2010) describes culture as a way of shared basic assumptions that determines how members perceive, think and act. Culture has an impact on the decision-making process, communication, and employee behaviour. Within this context, The Competing Values Framework is a framework that breaks down organisational culture into four types: clan, market, hierarchy, and adhocracy (Gong et al., 2022). Clan culture encourages co-operative working and a sense of belonging, and adhocracy encourages innovation and

flexibility. On the other hand, market culture emphasises competitiveness and hierarchy emphasises control and stability.

Empirical research has highlighted that organisational culture impacts employee perceptions and organisational performance. Hartnell et al. (2019) discovered that clans and adhocracy cultures positively correlate with employee satisfaction and innovation, while hierarchy cultures correlate with efficiency and potentially with less adaptability. Similarly, Iskamto (2023) showed that organisational culture is a good indicator of organisational effectiveness. However, these studies concentrate on a wide range of organizations highlighting the need for a specific study on academic environment. Internationalisation strategies are more likely to be implemented in institutions with an inclusive and supportive culture (Avolio & Benzaquen, 2024; Brito et al., 2025). Simultaneously, cultural fit is critical to collaboration and engagement between faculty members. Despite its critical role, however, organisational culture is often considered as a background factor that influences organisational outcomes. This study aims to overcome this limitation by looking at culture as a mediator between the variables leadership and commitment.

2.5 Research Gap

Although a large number of research have studied transformational leadership, organizational culture, and organizational commitment, there are still some crucial gaps, especially for internationalized HEIs. Similarly, previous literature has consistently associated transformational leadership to positive employee outcome, it is limited to direct links between transformational leadership and employee outcomes. A few recent studies have started to begin to look at mediators, but these have been small studies. An important area of weakness is the lack of integration of the organisational culture as a mediating variable. Research by Alsadoon, (2022) supports the notion that organisational culture is a key mediating factor between leadership and organisational outcomes; however, most of the studies have been conducted in corporate and/or industrial contexts. Similarly, Iskamto (2023) emphasizes that organisational culture has an impact on employees' attitudes and organisational performance, but studies based on empirical research in higher education are still scarce. This highlighted an absence of knowledge about sector-specific relationships between leadership and culture and employee commitment. Moreover, organisational commitment has received abundant attention as an outcome variable but little research has sought to examine its relationship to other outcomes of internationalisation in higher education. This is a big gap as staff commitment is an important component to maintaining international engagement. Thus, the study addressed these gaps by introducing an integrated model that investigates the influence of transformational leadership on organisational commitment mediated by the organisational culture in internationalized private higher education institutions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

This study applied a quantitative research method which included a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationship of transformational leadership, organisational culture, and organisational commitment in Higher Education Institutions. A quantitative approach allows one to test hypothesised relationships between variables to be tested using statistical techniques and for findings to be generalised to a larger population (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). While a longitudinal design offers greater causality in the causal

analysis, a cross-sectional design is also appropriate for examining relationships and mediation effects, especially when employing sophisticated analysis (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Moreover, such designs are commonly used in organisational and leadership studies because of its efficiency of data collection.

3.2. Research Context and Population Overview.

The study took place in internationalised higher education institutions, namely in private universities, which are actively involved in international activities. These institutions face growing competition and globalisation which are suitable contexts for analysing leadership and culture and commitment dynamics. The target group was the academic and administrative staffs of these institutions. Staff members were key actors in the implementation of internationalisation strategies along with their attitudes and behaviours which are directly shaped by leadership practices and organisational culture (Nguyen, 2023). Their perceptions were useful in understanding the internal mechanism of the institution that facilitates or inhibits the effectiveness of the institution.

3.3 Details of Sample

This study utilised purposive sampling technique. This enabled to opt for the participants that satisfy requirements of working in institutions that are actively engaged in the internationalisation activities. In this case, the purposeful sampling was suitable because the participants were needed to have experience and knowledge of the variables of the study.

After removing incomplete and invalid responses, finally 387 responses were included in the study. As per KMO and Bartlett's test KMO indicated (KMO = 0.910 > 0.6) a more than adequate sample size considering all the chosen item. The Bartlett's test highlights significant Sphericity (chis-square = 19916.144, df = 1431, $p < 0.05$) of the data, indicating adequately valid size of the dataset to develop and structural equation model.

Table 3.1, indicated that 54.38% of participants or educators are female. Most of the educators are 20 to 49 years old (87%), whereas 37.89% of them are 30 to 39 years old. Participants mostly have 1 to 10 years of working experience (79%), whereas 42.01% of them have 6 to 10 years of experience as educator. Maximum proportion of the participants are from STEMM (28.94%) courses whereas 28.94% are from Commerce and Business fields, and around 29% are from both Social Science and Arts Humanities fields.

Table 3.1 Sample Characteristics and Demographics

		Count	N %
Gender	Male	177	45.62%
	Female	211	54.38%
Age	20 to 29	112	28.87%
	30 to 39	147	37.89%
	40 to 49	81	20.88%
	50 to 59	45	11.60%
	60+	3	0.77%
Experience	Less than 1 year	16	4.12%
	1 to 5 years	144	37.11%
	6 to 10 years	163	42.01%
	11 to 20 years	57	14.69%
	20+ years	8	2.06%
Stream	STEMM	146	37.73%
	Commerce and Business	112	28.94%
	Social Science and Education	65	16.80%
	Arts and Humanities	48	12.40%
	Vocational and Practical Fields	16	4.13%

3.4 Data Collection Method

The data was gathered electronically using a structured self-administered questionnaire. It was distributed via online mode in the universities. The use of the online mode enabled smooth collection of data and easy approach towards participants.

3.5 Survey Instrument, Reliability, Validity and Analysis

Three scales were used in this study. Firstly, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) of Bass and Avolio was used to measure transformational leadership (Dhingra et al., 2024). The organisational commitment scale is used to measure organisational commitment, which is defined by the Three-Component Model (TCM) (Meyer & Natalie, 2004). The Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) is used to assess organisational culture (Di Carlo & Franco, 2017).

As per Exploratory Factor Analysis of raw data all 12 items of Transformational Leadership were included with adequate factor loading, whereas 6 items form OCAI scale were deleted for very low communality extraction (extraction < 0.4) and 2 items from TCM Employee Commitment Scale were deleted for very low factor

loadings (FL < 0.4). As per confirmatory factor analysis. As per Table 3.2, the item loadings are high (FL > 0.7), indicating the independent and strong contribution of each item of each scale to the development of the respective latent scales. The validity (AVE > 0.5) of all latent scales is higher than the acceptable level with high Reliability (CR > 0.9) and very high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.9).

Table 3.2 Questionnaire Items, Factor Loadings, Reliability and Validity

	Std. Factor Loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
OrgCult1 <- OrgCult	0.761	0.571	0.960	0.959
OrgCult11 <- OrgCult	0.718			
OrgCult12 <- OrgCult	0.805			
OrgCult13 <- OrgCult	0.792			
OrgCult14 <- OrgCult	0.722			
OrgCult16 <- OrgCult	0.737			
OrgCult17 <- OrgCult	0.749			
OrgCult18 <- OrgCult	0.748			
OrgCult2 <- OrgCult	0.728			
OrgCult20 <- OrgCult	0.803			
OrgCult21 <- OrgCult	0.757			
OrgCult22 <- OrgCult	0.743			
OrgCult23 <- OrgCult	0.785			
OrgCult4 <- OrgCult	0.774			
OrgCult5 <- OrgCult	0.716			
OrgCult7 <- OrgCult	0.749			
OrgCult8 <- OrgCult	0.792			
OrgCult9 <- OrgCult	0.707			
OrgComt1 <- OrgComt	0.864	0.727	0.975	0.975
OrgComt10 <- OrgComt	0.897			
OrgComt12 <- OrgComt	0.874			
OrgComt13 <- OrgComt	0.797			
OrgComt14 <- OrgComt	0.848			
OrgComt15 <- OrgComt	0.851			
OrgComt16 <- OrgComt	0.869			
OrgComt17 <- OrgComt	0.88			
OrgComt2 <- OrgComt	0.814			
OrgComt3 <- OrgComt	0.877			
OrgComt4 <- OrgComt	0.837			
OrgComt5 <- OrgComt	0.849			

OrgComt7 <- OrgComt	0.846			
OrgComt8 <- OrgComt	0.831			
OrgComt9 <- OrgComt	0.849			
TL1 <- TL	0.885	0.738	0.971	0.971
TL10 <- TL	0.859			
TL11 <- TL	0.836			
TL12 <- TL	0.869			
TL2 <- TL	0.793			
TL3 <- TL	0.893			
TL4 <- TL	0.857			
TL5 <- TL	0.843			
TL6 <- TL	0.833			
TL7 <- TL	0.871			
TL8 <- TL	0.875			
TL9 <- TL	0.890			

Note: CFA Model, Correlation within Latent Variable Assumed

Because this study includes complex models with latent constructs, SEM is considered to be suitable (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Data analysis is carried out by means of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) which is able to analyze the relationship among variables simultaneously including mediation effect.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Research was conducted with due regard for ethics and ethical issues are addressed. The participation was voluntary and respondents were briefed on the aim of the study. Personal identifying information was not collected while confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. The measures were consistent with the accepted ethical guidelines for social science research.

4. Results

In the following section, he means the latent variables have been developed by calculating the average of the underlying items of each latent variable. Along with the parent latent variable, the sub-group of questions or items is also considered for sub-factors of each latent scale.

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Mean Latent Variables

	Mean	SD	Q1	Median	Q3
TL_II_m	3.068	0.988	2.333	3.000	4.000
TL_IM_m	3.114	0.947	2.333	3.000	4.000
TL_IS_m	2.947	1.009	2.333	3.000	3.667
TL_IC_m	3.266	0.979	2.667	3.333	4.000
TL_m	3.099	0.949	2.250	3.083	3.917
OrgCult_DC_m	3.497	0.715	3.000	3.333	4.000
OrgCult_OL_m	3.497	0.699	3.000	3.333	4.000
OrgCult_ME_m	3.369	0.731	3.000	3.333	4.000
OrgCult_OG_m	3.669	0.694	3.000	3.667	4.333
OrgCult_SE_m	3.302	0.717	2.667	3.333	3.667
OrgCult_CS_m	3.340	0.709	2.667	3.333	3.667
OrgCult_m	3.445	0.657	2.944	3.167	3.889
OrgComt_AC_m	3.431	0.930	2.800	3.400	4.200
OrgComt_CC_m	3.104	0.937	2.600	3.000	3.800
OrgComt_NC_m	3.520	0.894	3.000	3.500	4.167
OrgComt_m	3.362	0.901	2.875	3.188	4.000

Note: N = 388, Range of each Item 1 to 5

As per Table 4.1, the average implementation of Transformational Leadership (3.099 ± 0.949) is at a moderate level. The average level of Intellectual Stimulation (2.947 ± 1.009), where all other aspects of Transformational Leadership are at a moderate level. The average level of perceived Organisational Culture (3.445 ± 0.657) is at a moderate to high level. Currently, the Organisational Glue (3.669 ± 0.694) is notably higher than all other sub-factors of organisational culture, and at a high level. The average level of perceived Organisational Commitment (3.362 ± 0.901) is at a higher than moderate level. The average level of Continuance Commitment (3.104 ± 0.657) is notably lower than Affective Commitment and Normative Commitment.

Table 4.2 Model Fitness Measures and Values

	Value	Acceptable
Chi-square	2756.696	
Number of model parameters	93	
Number of observations	387	
Degrees of freedom	942	
P value	0.000	
ChiSqr/df	2.926429	< 3
RMSEA	0.076	< 0.08
RMSEA LOW 90% CI	0.073	
RMSEA HIGH 90% CI	0.079	
SRMR	0.053	< 0.08
NFI	0.877	> 0.9
TLI	0.901	> 0.10
CFI	0.905	> 0.11

As per Table 4.2, the chi-square/df is less than 3, which is within an acceptable range, whereas RMSEA and SRMR both are lower than 0.08, which is also within the acceptable range. However, NFI is lower than 0.9, whereas TLI and CFI are higher than 0.9. Therefore, 6 out of 7 fitness measures indicated an acceptable model fitness.

As per Table 4.3, the HTMT coefficients are less than 0.8, indicating adequate independence and distinguishable uniqueness of each latent variable, which highlights discriminant validity of the PLS-SEM model. The VIFs (VIF < 5) indicated no risk of multicollinearity.

Table 4.3 Discriminant Validity and Multi-collinearity Test Results

	HTMT Matrix			VIF
	OrgComt	OrgCult	TL	DV: OrgComt
OrgComt				
OrgCult	0.513			1.288
TL	0.617	0.486		1.288

As per Figure 4.1, 22.4% variability of Organisational Culture (R-square = 0.224) can be predicted by Transformational Leadership, and 42.2% variability of Organisational Commitment (R-square = 0.422) can be predicted by Transformational Leadership and Organisational Culture. As per Table 4.4, Transformational

Leadership (B = 0.472, p < 0.05) has a significant, direct and positive effect size on Organisational Culture, and Transformational Leadership (B = 0.473, p < 0.05) has a positive, significant and similar effect size on Organisational Commitment. Therefore, higher implementation of Transformational Leadership is directly related to higher perceived Organisational Culture. At a similar magnitude, Transformational Leadership is directly related to higher perceived Organisational Commitment without involving the mediator Organisational Culture.

Table 4.4 PLS-SEM Path Coefficient Results

Effect	Path	Coeff.(O)	Coeff.(M)	STDEV	T statistics	P values
Direct	OrgCult -> OrgComt	0.276	0.277	0.049	5.619	0.000
	TL -> OrgComt	0.472	0.473	0.045	10.597	0.000
	TL -> OrgCult	0.473	0.474	0.047	10.006	0.000
Indirect	TL -> OrgCult->OrgComt	0.130	0.131	0.026	5.108	0.000
Total	TL -> OrgComt	0.603	0.604	0.036	16.639	0.000

Note: O = Original Sample, M = Bootstrapped Sample Mean

Table 4.4 indicates that Transformational Leadership (B = 0.130, p < 0.05) has a significant, positive and indirect effect on Organisational Commitment through Organisational Culture, which signifies the mediation role of Organisational Culture. Organisational Culture is a significant partial mediator, where the direct effect of Transformational Leadership is notably stronger on Organisational Commitment than the indirect effect through the mediator Organisational Culture.

5. Discussion

5.1. Key Findings

The study's findings provide some important new information on how organizational culture, organizational commitment, and transformational leadership relate to one another in internationalized higher education institutions. First, the results show that there are chances to improve leadership practices in order to more successfully accomplish the institutional goals, although the degree of implementational transformational leadership is moderate, suggesting that leaders exhibit some transformative behaviors. Second, a significantly substantial positive correlation between organizational commitment and transformative leadership was found. This implies that executives who encourage, assist, and inspire their employees can directly increase their psychological connection to the organization.

Additionally, organizational culture was significantly improved by transformational leadership. It highlighted how crucial leadership can be in promoting a shared set of standards, values, and organizational procedures. Third, organizational commitment was shown to be significantly influenced by organizational culture. Based on alignment with organizational commitment, it demonstrated the beneficial impact of an organizational culture that supports the organization. Most significantly, the study demonstrates how organizational culture partially mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. This suggests

that creating a great corporate culture has an indirect impact on commitment in addition to the direct impact of transformative leadership. Lastly, the model accounted for a significant amount of variance in organisational commitment, suggesting that the interplay of leadership and culture is a meaningful factor in shaping employees' attitude to the organisation. The results highlighted the need for leadership to be consistent with the organisation's culture to foster staff engagement and improve the success of internationalisation efforts in higher education institutes.

5.2. Discussion with Existing Literatures

The results validate the model proposed and have relevance to the existing literature when compared with the proposed model. This result confirms the argument by Bass and Riggio (2006), which stated that transformational leadership is especially important in dynamic settings like in higher education. The study revealed that transformational leadership was adopted at a moderate level in the sampled institutions. However, it indicated that leaders exhibit some transformational behaviours, but still have some potential to develop their leadership skills. The blurred lines of national and international service and the moderate level of leadership observed may be contributing factors to the difficulties institutions experience in becoming effective global actors.

The results also showed that transformational leadership has a significant positive direct effect on organisational commitment. This aligned with a rich amount of evidence that suggests transformational leaders increase the psychological commitment of employees to the organization. For instance, Demir (2008) identified that transformational leadership helps to build emotional bonds through the establishment of trust and commitment to organisational goals. Additionally, Ismail and Mydin (2019) showed that transformational leadership builds intrinsic motivation, which leads to higher levels of commitment. Similarly, Baptiste (2019) and Hoch et al. (2018) verified that transformational leadership has a strong impact on employees' attitudes such as organisational commitment and job satisfaction. This is particularly relevant in the higher education sector, where engaged academics are more likely to engage in teaching, research, and internationalisation efforts.

Apart from its direct effect, transformational leadership was also seen to have a significant effect on organisational culture. This aligns with the theoretical argument that leaders are important agents in the processes of establishing organisational values, norms and practices (Schein, 2010). The results align with the empirical evidence that shows that the transformational leader creates cultures of innovation, collaboration, and adaptability. For example, Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009) showed that transformational leadership stimulates organisational innovation through the improvement of intrinsic motivation. Recent research by Nguyen (2023) and Notarnicola et al. (2024) has also shown that transformational leadership has a positive influence on adaptability and innovation. Therefore, the present results further confirm the importance of leadership in developing an enabling organisational culture.

It was also discovered that organisational culture can have an impact in a positive way on organisational commitment. The findings were consistent with previous studies, which have found culture to be an important influence on employee attitudes and behaviours. According to Hartnell et al (2019) clan and adhocracy cultures are positively correlated with employee satisfaction and innovation, respectively, which increases commitment. Similarly, Iskamto (2023) found organisational culture as one of the main determinants of

organisational success. Additionally, Avolio and Benzaquen (2024) and Brito et al. (2025) highlighted the role of supportive and inclusive organisational culture in implementing internationalisation strategies. These results indicate that if the employees feel good and close to the organisation, they are more likely to have a sense of belonging to the organisation and commitment to it. Additionally, this study highlighted one of the most important findings: Organisational culture is a partial mediator between the relationship between transformational leadership and organisational commitment. The results of the mediation analysis showed that the transformational leadership positively influences the organisational commitment with the intermediary role of organisational culture. The finding extends empirical support for the theoretical integration of leadership and culture as advocated by Schein (2010), that culture acts as a means of how leadership has an impact on others.

Partial mediation suggests that there is a part of the relationship between transformational leadership and organisational commitment that is not accounted for by organisational culture. Cohen (2014) has noted that organisational commitment reflects a number of factors such as leadership and organisational context. In a similar manner, Kılınç et al. (2024) identified that the leadership support and organisational culture are significant factors impacting academic staff commitment. Thus, the findings align with previous research where mediating factors were identified as being important, and the direct effect of leadership was also acknowledged. Thus, the current finding shows that culture is a transmission, a linkage, between leadership behaviours and employee attitudes.

Importantly, the direct effect of transformational leadership is stronger than the indirect effect via culture. It indicated that leadership has a strong effect on organisational commitment beyond the influence of culture. This is further proof that transformational leadership can inspire and motivate employees, which goes beyond structure and culture. However, the strong indirect effect also indicates that leadership effectiveness can be improved when it is coupled with a positive organisational culture. Theoretically, the findings are consistent with the inclusion of the concepts of transformational leadership theory, organisational commitment theory, and organisational culture theory. The results indicate that the proposed conceptual framework is supported, as leadership affects the employees' commitment directly and indirectly through cultural mechanisms. This adds to the literature by filling in the gap left by previous research. The results were relevant to internationalised higher education. Educational institutions serving in a global context need effective leadership as well as an environment that fosters innovation, collaboration, and flexibility. It aligns with Gong et al. (2022), which has pointed out that each cultural type can affect the functioning of an organisation in unique and varying ways. It is especially true when it comes to internationalisation, where flexible and inclusive cultures are particularly relevant. The present research proves that Transformational leadership can have a pivotal role in creating such cultures, which can increase organisational commitment and contribute to institutional objectives.

5.3. Practical Implications

This study findings have implications for leaders and policymakers of institutions trying for internationalisation. Training programs should aim to strengthen leaders' skills in inspiring, motivating and supporting staff, including their capacity for innovation and adaptability for internationalisation. The role of transformational leadership on organisational culture and commitment is very significant, which means that universities should pay attention to leadership development programs. Second, organisational culture partially

mediated this relationship, which suggests a need for institutions to take steps to create an institutional culture that is supportive and inclusive. This can be done through the promotion of common values, through cooperation and by fostering the culture of academic involvement in international activities like partnerships and mobility programmes. Third, the correlation between organisational culture and commitment indicates that the university management should focus on employee engagement management, such as recognition programs, participative decision-making, and communication. Such practices can enhance employees' feelings of belonging and dedication to institutional objectives. Lastly, Institutions can also enhance staff engagement through incorporating leadership practices with cultural development. As the results suggest that leadership and culture need to be crafted in an intentional way to improve the effectiveness of internationalisation programmes. It would help to sustain and achieve success in their global engagement strategies.

6. Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the role transformational leadership plays in organisational commitment as mediated by an organisational culture in internationalised Higher Educational Institutions. The results show that transformational leadership has a significant direct and indirect impact on improving level of organizational commitment via organizational culture. In particular, leaders through their transformational behaviours can help to build a positive organisational culture that fosters employees' psychological attachment to the organisation. The partial mediation of organisational culture shows that it is important to connect the leadership practices to the values of the culture to get sustainable organisational outcomes. The study also makes a contribution to the literature by bringing together the concepts of leadership, culture, and commitment in a single framework and applying it to the case of internationalised private universities. Although it has made some contributions, there are some limitations to the study. One limitation is the use of a cross-sectional research method, which prevents the researcher from being able to formulate causal conclusions between the variables. Second, common method bias can exist due to the use of self-reported data, which is based on the participants' perceptions. Thirdly, the study centres on an specific context (internationalised higher education institutions) that can restrict the generalisability of the results to other sectors or regions. In addition, samples may not be representative due to the use of non-probability sampling. These limitations can be overcome in future studies by using longitudinal designs that would aid in understanding causal relationships and change over time. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods could also be considered to better understand the leadership, culture and commitment relationship. In addition, the relationships could be further examined with the inclusion of other mediating or moderating variables, such as employee engagement or organisational support, to gain a fuller picture of these relationships. Generalising the results would also be strengthened if the study was expanded to other institutional settings and geographical areas. The directions can enhance the knowledge about the role of internal organisational factors in the success of internationalisation in higher education further.

Declarations

Ethical approval: This study was approved by the Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC), Universiti Malaya, Malaysia (Approval No. UM.TNC(P&I)/UMREC/3/5231). This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki its later amendments.

Consent to participate: Written informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in the study.

Consent to publish: Not applicable.

Data availability statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, the data is not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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Disclosure of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Authorship contribution statement:

S.T.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Visualization.

Z.B.A.: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Supervision.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to its submission and publication.

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Figures

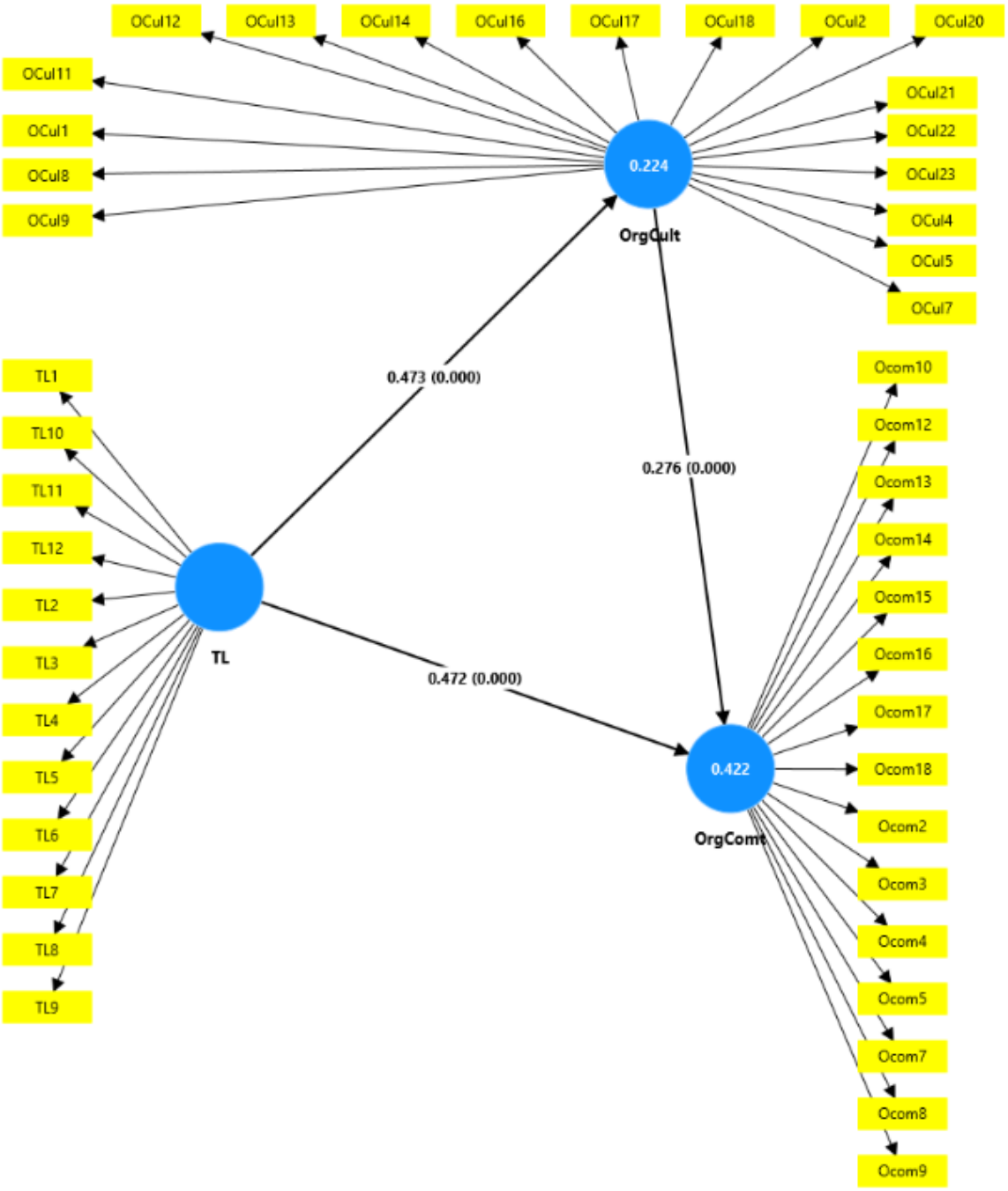


Figure 1

Figure 4.1 PLS-SEM Visual Design in SMART-PLS with Annotated Bootstrapped Result