



Faculty of Technology Management and Technopreneurship

**The Relationship of Transformational Leadership on Project
Management in Multinational Companies in Malaysia**

Alina Kiran

Doctor of Philosophy

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**The Relationship of Transformational Leadership on Project Management in
Multinational Companies in Malaysia**

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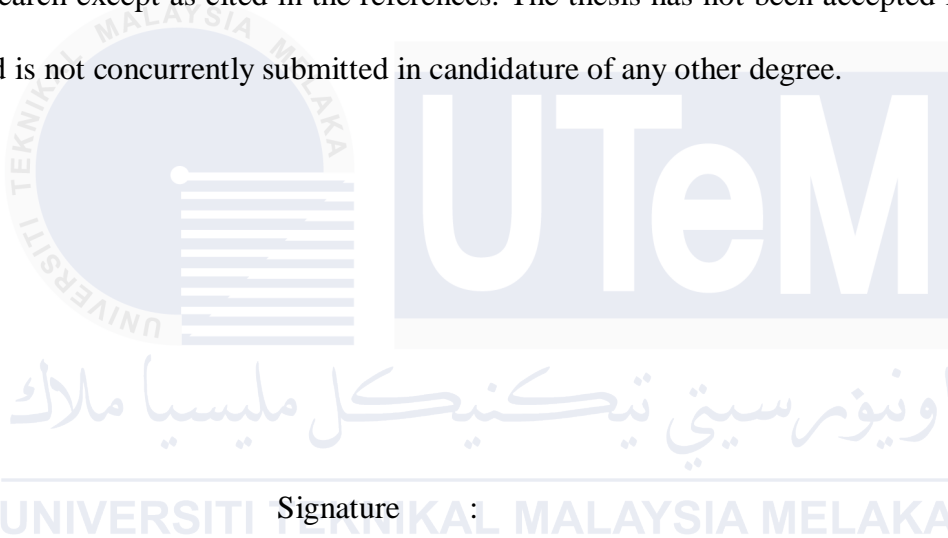


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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis entitled “The Relationship of Transformational Leadership on Project Management in Multinational Companies in Malaysia” is the result of my own research except as cited in the references. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.



Signature :

Name : ALINA KIRAN

Date : 10 March 2025

APPROVAL

I hereby declare that I have read this thesis and, in my opinion, this thesis is sufficient in terms of scope and quality for the award of Doctor of Philosophy.



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Date : 10 March 2025

DEDICATION

I am profoundly grateful to my beloved mother, sisters and my husband for their unwavering support and steadfast presence throughout this journey. Their ceaseless prayers and heartfelt supplications have been a source of strength for me. I deeply appreciate their unconditional love and encouragement, which have inspired me to persevere in the face of challenges.

In addition, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor and co-supervisor for their invaluable guidance and support. Their insights and expertise have significantly enriched my work and contributed to my personal and academic growth. I am truly honored to have had their mentorship during this important phase of my life.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between transformational leadership (TFL) and project management (PM) in multinational companies (MNCs) in Malaysia, focusing on the mediating roles of project management assets (PMA) and psychological empowerment (PE). TFL, recognized for its capacity to inspire and drive change, was examined in the context of PM by evaluating its impact on key performance indicators such as timeliness, cost-effectiveness, and stakeholder satisfaction. Utilizing the Value, Rarity, Imitability, and Organizational Support (VRIO) framework within the Resource-Based View (RBV) paradigm, this research explored the significance of PMA in achieving a competitive advantage throughout the PM process. A quantitative analysis was conducted on data collected from 60 Malaysian MNCs using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to assess the correlations among TFL, PMA, and project efficiency. The findings revealed that TFL positively influenced project outcomes, including timeliness, cost-effectiveness, and stakeholder satisfaction. PMA and PE acted as significant mediators, with robust project management resources and empowered employees leading to improved project performance and competitive advantage. Furthermore, several contextual factors specific to the Malaysian business environment were identified as moderators in the proposed relationships, highlighting the need for cultural sensitivity and adaptability in leadership practices. The study concluded that TFL is crucial for project success in Malaysian MNCs, and its effectiveness is enhanced by strong project management assets and an empowered workforce. These insights contribute significantly to the literature on leadership and project management by offering practical recommendations for leaders, project managers, and policymakers in developing effective strategies to enhance PM in Malaysia's dynamic and culturally diverse business climate. Ultimately, this study adds valuable knowledge applicable globally and specifically within the Malaysian context, enriching ongoing discussions in the fields of leadership and project management research.

ABSTRAK

Hubungan Kepimpinan Transformasi terhadap Pengurusan Projek dalam Syarikat Multinasional di Malaysia

Kajian ini menyiasat hubungan antara kepimpinan transformasi (TFL) dan pengurusan projek (PM) dalam syarikat multinasional (MNCs) di Malaysia, dengan memberi tumpuan kepada peranan pengantara aset pengurusan projek (PMA) dan pemeraksanaan psikologi (PE). TFL, yang diiktiraf kerana kemampuannya untuk memberi inspirasi dan memacu perubahan, dikaji dalam konteks PM dengan menilai kesannya terhadap petunjuk prestasi utama seperti ketepatan masa, keberkesanan kos, dan kepuasan pihak berkepentingan. Dengan menggunakan kerangka Nilai, Kelangkaan, Tiruan, dan Sokongan Organisasi (VRIO) dalam paradigma Pandangan Berasaskan Sumber (RBV), kajian ini meneroka kepentingan PMA dalam mencapai kelebihan daya saing sepanjang proses PM. Analisis kuantitatif telah dijalankan berdasarkan data yang dikumpulkan daripada 60 MNCs Malaysia menggunakan Pemodelan Persamaan Struktural Kuasa Dua Terkecil Sebahagian (PLS-SEM) untuk menilai korelasi antara TFL, PMA, dan kecekapan projek. Penemuan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa TFL memberi kesan positif terhadap hasil projek, termasuk ketepatan masa, keberkesanan kos, dan kepuasan pihak berkepentingan. PMA dan PE bertindak sebagai pengantara yang signifikan, dengan aset pengurusan projek yang kukuh dan pekerja yang diberi kuasa membawa kepada peningkatan prestasi projek dan kelebihan daya saing. Di samping itu, beberapa faktor kontekstual yang khusus dalam persekitaran perniagaan Malaysia dikenal pasti sebagai moderator dalam hubungan yang dicadangkan, menekankan keperluan untuk kepekaan budaya dan keupayaan menyesuaikan diri dalam amalan kepimpinan. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa TFL adalah penting untuk kejayaan projek dalam MNCs Malaysia, dan keberkesanan dipertingkatkan dengan aset pengurusan projek yang kukuh serta tenaga kerja yang diberi kuasa. Penemuan ini memberikan sumbangan yang signifikan kepada literatur mengenai kepimpinan dan pengurusan projek dengan menawarkan cadangan praktikal kepada pemimpin, pengurus projek, dan pembuat dasar dalam membangunkan strategi berkesan bagi meningkatkan PM dalam persekitaran perniagaan Malaysia yang dinamik dan berbilang budaya. Akhirnya, kajian ini menambah pengetahuan yang berharga yang boleh diaplikasikan di peringkat global dan khususnya dalam konteks Malaysia, memperkayakan perbincangan berterusan dalam bidang kajian kepimpinan dan pengurusan projek.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	-	Average Variance Extracted
CSFs	-	Critical Success Factors
CSR	-	Corporate Social Responsibility
DOSM	-	Department of Statistics Malaysia
EFA	-	Exploratory Factor Analysis
FDI	-	Foreign Direct Investment
FMM	-	Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
HR	-	Human Resource
IC	-	Individualised Consideration
II	-	Idealised Influence
IM	-	Inspirational Motivation
IS	-	Intellectual Stimulation
JD-R	-	Job Demands-Resources
KFQ	-	Kelley Followership Questionnaire
KMO	-	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
MNCs	-	Multinational corporations
PMA	-	Physical Asset Management
PE	-	Psychological Empowerment
PLS	-	Partial Least Squares
PM	-	Project Management
PMA	-	Project Management Assets
PMAC	-	Project Management Asset Characteristics
PMP	-	Project Management Performance
R&D	-	Research and Development
RBV	-	Resource-Based View

ROT	-	Resource Orchestration Theory
SEM	-	Structural Equation Modelling
SMEs	-	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TF	-	Transformational
TFL	-	Transformational Leadership
VIF	-	Variance Inflation Factor
VRIO	-	Value, Rarity, Imitability, and Organisational Support



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Performance has always been one of the main issues encountered by organisations in accomplishing projects. Recent research indicates that effective survival strategies—such as project management innovation (PMI), tailored project governance, and high-performance work practices—can enhance project management performance (PMP) and contribute to sustainability and resilience in overcoming project challenges (Han, Xu, & Liu, 2022; Musawir, Khurram, & Alhumoud, 2022). Many companies seek to enhance their project management performance (PMP) by implementing effective survival strategies (Musawir et al., 2017). Performance measurement has been acknowledged as one of the best methods to ensure project sustainability. The three factors that dictate the success and failure of projects are cost, quality, and schedule. These three factors make up the iron triangle model that determines PMP outcomes (Liang and Wang, 2019). In recent years, PMP has become a universal topic for project management (PM) scholars (Albert et al., 2017). Notably, long duration, low quality, and cost increment lead to project failure (Oh and Choi, 2020). Project sustainability is attained if the interests of all stakeholders are secured, whereby the society, the contractor, and particularly, the leadership style determine the success of a project (Osei-Kyei and Chan, 2015). First, it is crucial to distinguish the critical success factors (CSFs) of a project based on PMP measurement and project success criteria (Akintoye and Kummaraswamy, 2016). Both CSFs and project success criteria are factors that directly

contribute to successful PMP. Even though it is difficult to design a model that accurately measures PMP, the iron triangle model has been widely applied across the globe to successfully meet project goals (NCPPP(National Council of Public-Private Partnership), 2017; CMAA(Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement) , 2018). However, contemporary research critiques the iron triangle for its limited scope, emphasizing the necessity to expand evaluation criteria to include stakeholder satisfaction, project sustainability, and leadership's role (Mir & Pinnington, 2022; Serrador & Turner, 2023). Specifically, transformational leadership has emerged as a crucial factor that can enhance project outcomes by motivating teams, encouraging innovation, and improving adaptability, especially within diverse multinational workforces such as those in Malaysia (Lee et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). Integrating leadership perspectives and stakeholder concerns into project management practices offers a more holistic framework to ensure long-term project success and sustainability. Modern studies emphasize that managing the trade-offs between these triple constraints is critical: delays, budget overruns, and quality issues are frequently cited as threats to successful outcomes. Evaluating and balancing these factors, alongside stakeholder needs and organizational support, leads to higher project success rates. Innovations in governance and team practices further strengthen outcomes by enabling organizations to adapt to changing demands and complex environments (Abdillah, Setiawan, & Suprayogi, 2024).

Due to its worldwide acceptance and validation, the iron triangle model was deployed in this study to address PMP measurement issues. Performance measurement is crucial to ensure the long-term viability of projects. Over the past few decades, many studies have extensively tested the crucial factors of PMP, such as leadership, managerial acumen, project management assets (PMA), psychological empowerment (PE), logistics, organisational

progress and learning, job demand, and knowledge enhancement (Busari, Khan, Abdullah, and Mughal, 2019). However, studies that collectively examine leadership style, PE, PMA, and PMP are in scarcity (Khan, Busari, Abdullah, and Mughal, 2018). Projects often fail due to lack of trust, misuse of resources and assets, power abuse by the project director or manager, and inefficient use of human and financial resources (Brown et al., 2016). Most projects end up in failure because the leaders poorly manage the resources, particularly managerial acumen, which is crucial in project management performance and assets. Hence, HR should be carefully managed to reap maximum output from minimum resources. Vrchota et al. (2020), who studied the CSFs of PMP, found that successful projects mostly rely on both financial and human resources. Project leaders have a vital role to improve PMP and achieve project goals. Exceptional performance is nearly impossible in the absence of a good leader (Bbaale, 2018; Busari et al., 2019). A leader acts as an agent and a role model because their behaviour towards a project has a heavy impact on the team members. Thus, project leaders must take the initiative to accomplish their projects (Al-Ali et al., 2017). Despite the vast studies on leadership and employee performance (see Albejaidi, Kundi, and Mughal, 2020; Mughal, 2020), only a handful have assessed the role of leaders in enhancing PMP with the mediating and moderating roles of PMA and PE, respectively. For instance, transformational leaders encourage intellectual stimulation, promote innovative problem solving, and adapt their leadership style to project needs, significantly boosting project outcomes (Eltayeb, 2021; Elmzein et al., 2021). Studies also reveal that leadership styles influence PMP indirectly through mediators like team collaboration and psychological empowerment, which enhance motivation and performance (Ahmad et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2020).

In ensuring project success and optimum output, it is crucial to take great care of PMA and manage resources effectively. This calls for an expert leader with plenty of experience as a project manager. Project leaders are important in all phases of the project - from start to completion (PMI(Project Management Institute), 2013). A project director ensures the efficient use of project resources and assets to meet project goals. The modern management approaches seek to comprehend the attitude of leaders towards others leadership styles (Taşçi and Titrek, 2020). As such, one should display a charismatic leadership style to motivate the project team. The qualities possessed by a transformational leader include positive behaviour, stimulation, consideration, and motivation (Busari et al., 2019). Leaders must be able to listen to the issues faced by the team members, besides assisting and guiding them (Khan et al., 2020).

Leadership qualities are vital to motivate team members to perform at a higher level. Intrinsic task motivation can be increased when the team members have choices, are permitted to work independently, and are included in the decision-making process. This may be accomplished via PE. The project team members can have autonomy and authority to give their opinion about optimal outcomes based on low-cost, high-quality, and timely task achievement (Meng and Sun, 2019), which is only viable in transformational leadership (TFL) style. Projects can be accomplished by subordinates through effective communication (Yang et al., 2011). The literature depicts some conditions for effective PMP, including enhanced communication, cohesiveness, collaboration, and team building, which reflect the results of good leadership (Aga et al., 2016). Transformational leaders foster an environment where team members feel empowered to contribute ideas and collaborate, leading to successful project outcomes (Ali et al., 2021; Han, Xu, & Liu, 2022). Through encouraging

open communication and teamwork, transformational leadership significantly improves project success by motivating and aligning the team toward common goals (AliShuai et al., 2021).

A transformational leader believes in marginal improvements that lead to success in work satisfaction. Employees would commit to hard work if the firm offers the expected incentives and future development prospects are considerably brighter. An emerging trend in PM is the increasing adoption of the TFL style by project managers (Cui, Liu, Hope, and Wang, 2018). However, only a few studies have assessed the transformational models and leadership styles across projects. The findings revealed some crucial future research directions, such as the blend of TFL style with other approaches either concurrently or sequentially. Recent research underscores transformational leadership (TFL) as a critical enabler of project success, particularly in multicultural and digitally evolving environments (Bass & Riggio, 2023; Zhang & Bartol, 2023). Unlike earlier studies focused on Western contexts, contemporary work highlights TFL's adaptability in emerging economies like Malaysia (Abdullah & Chong, 2023). For example, Lee et al. (2023) found transformational leadership positively influences project team innovation and performance, while Mir and Pinnington (2022) emphasized leadership and stakeholder engagement as vital expansions to the traditional iron triangle constraints. Wang et al. (2022) highlighted that transformational leadership enhances adaptability and performance in multinational project teams. Furthermore, psychological empowerment serves as a mediator improving project teams' intrinsic motivation and autonomy leading to superior outcomes (Serrador & Turner, 2023).

Despite the increased global attention to PM in recent years (Huemann and Silvius, 2017), there has been a lack of consistency in the terminologies that define project roles