

## **The Effects of Benevolent Leadership in Ameliorating Turnover Problem in Hotel Industry**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the relationship between benevolent leadership and employees' organisational commitment in order to provide insights for turnover issue in the hotel industry of Malaysia. A total of 163 employees regardless of department and position level from four- and five-star hotels in Klang Valley have participated in the questionnaire survey. Confirmatory Factor Analysis was adopted to ensure the internal consistencies and the capability of the measuring instruments in explaining the constructs. The data was further analysed by employing Structural Equation Modeling to test the hypothesis proposed in this study. The empirical results show that there is a positive and significant effect of benevolent leadership towards organisational commitment. The last section of this paper deliberates the conclusion, contributions and suggestions for future research.

**Keywords:** Human Resource Management, Organizational Behavior, Leadership, Hospitality Industry Management

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The high turnover rate in the hospitality industry is not only a regional but a global issue. Scholars found that hospitality industry has a high turnover rate not only in developing countries but also developed countries, which includes the sub-sectors of hotel industry such as restaurants and lodging industry (Abdullah et al., 2010). In Malaysia, half of the total turnover rate of the tourism industry is contributed by hoteliers (Saad et al., 2012). There are evidences that the turnover issue of the hotel industry has been highlighted by numerous scholars since 21<sup>st</sup> century (e.g. Okumus, 2002; Nankervis et al., 2008; Abdullah et al., 2010; Saad et al., 2012; Albattat & Som, 2013). Albattat and Som (2013) proposed that the factors of the turnover issue in Malaysia's hospitality industry are poor working conditions, low salaries, and injustice. Previous research suggested that the turnover issue could be improved by implementing suitable strategies in retaining hotel employees (Okumus, 2002; Saad et al., 2012), enhancing the relationship between the leaders and hotel employees (Abdullah et al., 2010), and giving better treatment to the hotel employees (Nankervis et al., 2008). However, the abovementioned issue remains until today. Kelly Services (2012) discovered that the worldwide hospitality/travel/leisure is one of the industries that have the lowest level of satisfaction towards their management's leadership style. Malaysian scholars have raised their attention towards the high turnover issues in Malaysia's hotel industry as well (e.g. Abdullah et al., 2010; Saad et al., 2012; Albattat & Som, 2013).

Abdullah et al. (2010) suggested that the relationship between hotel employees and their leader might improve the turnover situation. Hence, benevolent leadership might come into the picture as a solution to the turnover issue. Benevolent leaders demonstrate individualised and holistic concern for subordinates' personal and familial well-being (Cheng et al., 2004; Wang & Cheng, 2010; Chen et al., 2011; Chan & Mak, 2012). It has been argued that benevolent leaders practice Confucian teachings which emphasize in the mutuality in social relations (Niu et al., 2009; Wang & Cheng, 2010). As Malaysian workers highly value the workplace interpersonal relations (Ayupp & Kong, 2010), benevolent leadership that focus on giving genuine and sincere care to employees in both work and non-work domain might immensely enhance the relationship between leaders and employees. A better leader-employee relationship might arouse employees to feel being supported by leaders in every aspect of life and, therefore, discourage the intention of leaving the company.

The effectiveness of benevolent leadership in developing a productive workforce has been highly proven in Chinese context (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Farh et al., 2006). Despite the huge transition that China is experiencing to realise globalization and societal modernization, the construct of benevolent leadership remained (Farh et al., 2008). It has been considered as the most desirable leadership style by the Chinese employees (Chan & Mak, 2012). Since benevolent leadership brings about positive organisational outcomes in a monocultural context, it is worthwhile to evaluate its effectiveness in a multi-cultural context such as Malaysia.

This study proposed organisational commitment as the indicator of turnover rate. Organisational commitment has been widely suggested in past studies to predict employees' turnover (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Blau & Boal, 1989; Bozeman & Perrewé, 2001; Shahnavaz & Jafri, 2009; Culpepper, 2011). As the amelioration of the relationship between leaders and employees was argued to have contribution in improving the turnover issues in hotel industry (Abdullah et al., 2010), it is predicted that benevolent leadership would enhance organisational commitment. In short, this study intended to examine the effect of benevolent leadership in improving employees' commitment.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES**

### ***2.1 Benevolent Leadership***

Benevolent leadership was proposed as one of the components under the paternalistic leadership (Niu et al., 2009; Chu et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2011). It has been widely studied in Chinese context as the most welcome leadership style (Chan & Mak, 2012) out of all three components under paternalistic leadership, namely, morale leadership, benevolent leadership and authoritarianism. Later, scholars have gradually focused on studying only benevolent leadership without considering it as a component of paternalistic leadership.

Scholars from different regions have different perspectives towards benevolent leadership. Benevolent leadership is well-known in Chinese context as a leadership style that the leaders are showing holistic caring behaviours to subordinates' personal well-being (e.g. Cheng et al., 2004; Wang & Cheng, 2010; Chen et al., 2011; Chan & Mak, 2012). However, Western scholars have no consensus on this definition. The Western scholars proposed benevolent otherwise as "the process of creating a virtuous

cycle of encouraging and initiating positive change in organisations through (a) ethical decision making; (b) creating a sense of meaning; (c) inspiring hope and fostering courage for positive action; and (d) leaving a positive impact for the larger community” (Karakas and Sarigollu, 2012, pg. 537).

Chinese scholars argued that benevolent leadership style is aligned with the Confucius teachings (e.g. Niu et al., 2009; Wang & Cheng, 2010). Wang & Cheng (2010) provides insights that benevolent leaders’ cultural awareness on the deeply-rooted Confucian teachings allowed them to practice the mutual obligations in social relations. The personalised concern given by benevolent leaders includes offering opportunities to correct mistakes, avoiding the public embarrassment of employees, providing coaching and mentoring, taking employees as family members (Wang & Cheng, 2010). However, Chan and Mak (2012) articulated that the quality and merit of holistic concern provided by leaders may be unequal as the discrepancy among employees’ contribution and interest may affect the unique dyadic relationship between leaders and employees.

Karakas and Sarigollu (2012) proposed benevolent leadership as a new concept with four dimensions which emphasize on creating the common good. The four dimensions of benevolent leadership proposed are ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement and community. The authors argued that these four streams of ideology enable leaders to overcome challenges and crisis in the competitive business world and lead the workforce to adapt and react opportunely to organisational changes.

Desrosiers and Thomson’s (2011) explanation of benevolent leadership is straightforward. The scholars articulated benevolent leaders as those who have expressed benevolence, good will, good intentions, and actions taken for the greater good. Meanwhile, benevolent leaders are expected to be endowed with the capability in leading, the capacity and know-how to supervise and guide others.

This study adopted the definition of benevolent leadership from Chinese context due to the uniqueness of leaders’ benevolent behaviours in concerning employees beyond work domain. Previous studies have tested the relationships between benevolent leadership and 1) creativity with creative identity role and autonomy as the moderators (Wang & Cheng, 2010); 2) followers’ performance with leader-member exchange as the mediator (Chan & Mak; 2012); and 3) organisational performance, affective commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviours (Karakas & Sarigollu, 2012).

## ***2.2 Organisational Commitment***

Allen and Meyer (1990) explained that organisational commitment is a psychological attachment of an employee owing to his/her relationship with the company that reduces the likelihood of he/she will leave the company. Allen and Meyer (1990) suggested three dimensions of organisational commitment, for instances, affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. Affective commitment arises when employees feel they are willing to retain the relationship with the organization due to the personal competence and comfort they gained from the job (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Continuance commitment occurs when an employee has no better alternative but to stay at the current position (Geh, 2010; Khan & Rashid, 2012). Normative commitment emerges when an employee is feeling obliged to stay with the company for the sake of co-workers and management.

Organisational commitment has been viewed as the predictor of employees’ turnover in numerous past studies (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Blau & Boal, 1989; Bozeman

& Perrewé, 2001; Shah Nawaz & Jafri, 2009; Culpepper, 2011). The purpose of the three dimensions of organisational commitment is to explain why employees stay in a particular company (Meyer et al., 1998). It is either because of employees' willingness, lack of alternatives or sense of obligation. If employees believed that they have not received fair treatment and the expectations are not achieved, the destructive feeling and behaviours towards their workplace attitudes, interactions, and their loyalty are expected (Ayers, 2001). The sense of commitment is beyond the relationship between employees and organization but can be applied to an occupation, personal career development, customers and union (Meyer et al., 1998).

### ***2.3 Hypothesis Development***

Previous studies have proven various leadership styles can lead to organisational commitment, for example, transactional and transformational leadership (e.g. Kent & Chelladurai, 2001; Avolio et al., 2004; Ahmadi et al., 2012; Dunn et al., 2012; Rehman et al., 2012; Yang, 2012; Othman et al., 2013); ethical leadership (e.g. Khuntia & Suar, 2004; Neubert et al., 2013); charismatic leadership (e.g. Rowden, 2000); active and passive leadership styles (e.g. Sušanj & Jakopec, 2012). Karakas and Sarigollu (2012) found that there is a relationship between benevolent leadership and affective commitment. Erben and Güneşer (2008) argued that benevolent behaviours promote organisational commitment as it is aligned with social exchange theory where the benevolent care given by leaders should lead to reciprocation of employees in committing further. Benevolent behaviours of leaders inspire employees and create an emotional bond between leaders and employees. This emotional connection discourages employees to leave the company as they might not receive benevolent treatment from other leaders. There are still limited studies in exploring the relationship between benevolent leadership and organisational commitment (e.g. Erben & Güneşer, 2008; Karakas & Sarigollu, 2012). This study intended to evaluate the effect of benevolent leadership on all three components of organisational commitment.

Hypothesis: *There is a positive relationship between Benevolent Leadership and Organisational Commitment.*

## **3. METHOD**

### ***3.1 Measures***

The "Benevolent Leadership Scale" in Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, and Farh's (2004) study was selected as the measurement instrument to evaluate leaders' benevolent leadership. In "Benevolent Leadership Scale", the construct was measured as a component under the instrument of paternalistic leadership proposed by Cheng, Chou, and Farh's (2000). There is a total of 11 items in this instrument. Each item in this instrument was evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale (i.e. strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree). The sample item of this construct is "Beyond work relations, my supervisor expresses concern about my daily life". The Cronbach's alpha value of benevolent leadership scale in Cheng et al. (2004) is 0.94.

The widely-adopted Allen and Meyer's (1990) "Organisational Commitment Scales" was selected in this study as the measurement instrument to determine employees' commitment. There is a total of three dimensions under this

construct, which are affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Each of the components has 8 items under this scale. All items of this scale were assessed by using a 5-point Likert scale (i.e. strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree). The sample items for each component are: 1) “This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me” (affective commitment); 2) “Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire” (continuance commitment); 3) “One of the major reasons I continue to work in this organisation is that I believe loyalty is important and, therefore, feel a sense of moral obligation to remain” (normative commitment). The Cronbach’s alpha values for each of the component are: 1) affective commitment = 0.87; 2) continuance commitment = 0.75; 3) normative commitment = 0.79).

In the later section of questionnaires, the demographic information was collected. The demographic variables include age, gender, race, religion, job tenure, department and position level. Employees are required to provide the answer that best describes their situation.

### ***3.2 Sample and Procedures***

This study aimed to provide insights for turnover issues in Malaysia’s hotel industry alluded in previous studies (e.g. Abdullah et al., 2010; Saad et al., 2012; Albattat & Som, 2013). The turnover rate of the entire tourism industry in Malaysia contributed 16% of Malaysia overall turnover rate and half of it comes from the hotel industry (Saad et al., 2012). The awfully high turnover rate will protract the development of Malaysia’s tourism industry (Abdullah et al., 2010). Thus, the targeted population would be the employees in Malaysia’s hotel industry.

The sample of this study is the hotel employees regardless of their position levels and departments. This study adopted a probability sampling method, which is cluster sampling, in the selection of respondents. By considering the representativeness and operationalisation of this study, those employees who are working in the 77 four- and five-stars hotels in Klang Valley (Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya) were selected as the targeted respondents. The hotels in Klang Valley possess one-third of the total number of hotel workers in Malaysia, which are: 1) Selangor: 10.06%; 2) Kuala Lumpur: 22.18%; and 3) Putrajaya: 1.15% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). The sample frame is constrained to only four- and five-stars hotels as the large-scale hotels are more systematic and rely largely on leadership in revising the business processes. The hotels were allowed to select the method of responding which is convenient to them as the questionnaires were prepared in both printed and electronic form. The questionnaires are bilingual. All items are illustrated in both English and Malay as this study targeted employees from both lower level and management level.

## **4. RESULTS**

### ***4.1 Descriptive Statistics***

A total of 163 usable questionnaires were collected out of 325 questionnaires being distributed. The response rate of this study is 50.46%. Table 1 shows the details of demographic information of the respondents. The data obtained depicted that around half of the hotel employees are young people who are below age 30 (52.8%).The

distribution of gender is almost equal where female respondents (54.6%) are just slightly more than male respondents (45.4%). There are one-fourth of the employees who worked only for less than a year (24.5%) and almost half of the employees have job tenure between one to three years (48.5%), which reflects the severity of turnover issues in hotel industry.

**Table 1** *Distribution of Employees Based on Demographic Data*

No.	Demographic Variable	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	<b>Age</b>		
	<30	86	52.8
	31-40	62	38.0
	41-50	11	6.7
	>50	4	2.5
		163	100
2.	<b>Gender</b>		
	Male	74	45.4
	Female	89	54.6
		163	100
3.	<b>Race</b>		
	Malay	84	51.5
	Chinese	37	22.7
	Indian	22	13.5
	Others	20	12.3
		163	100
4.	<b>Religion</b>		
	Islam	87	53.4
	Buddhist	27	16.6
	Hindu	17	10.4
	Christian	29	17.8
	Others	3	1.8
		163	100
5.	<b>Job Tenure</b>		
	<1	40	24.5
	1-3	79	48.5
	4-6	28	17.2
	7-10	5	3.1
	>10	11	6.7
		163	100
6.	<b>Department</b>		
	Accounting & Finance	10	6.1
	Management	3	1.8
	Sales & Marketing	16	9.8
	Human Resource	9	5.5
	Engineering	4	2.5
	Information Technology	1	0.6
	Front Office	22	13.5
	Food & Beverage	41	25.2
	Housekeeping	22	13.5
	Security	11	6.7
	Others	24	14.7
		163	100

<b>7. Position</b>		
Support Staff	87	53.4
Administrative Staff	44	27.0
Supervisor	15	9.2
Assistant Manager	5	3.1
Others	12	7.4
	<hr/> 163	<hr/> 100

N=163

#### 4.2 Profile of Variables

Table 2 shows the values of mean, standard deviation and variance for each construct of this study. On a 5-point Likert scale, the results reported that the mean values of both constructs are higher than the medium value of 3.00. Benevolent leadership has a higher mean value (3.67) compared to organisational commitment (3.28). The lower mean score of organisational commitment might be on the grounds that the component of continuance commitment generates negative scores as benevolent leadership is expected to discourage employees' retention due to limited alternatives. Both the constructs have standard deviations lower than 1.00, which implies the score variation and dispersion from the mean value was narrow. In other words, the respondents perceived the aspects of this study commonly.

By observing the results of demographic variables, this study revealed that the group of hotel employees who have the longest job tenure (more than 10 years) has a great mean value of 3.72 for benevolent leadership and a highest mean value (3.38) for organisational commitment compared to other group of respondents. It may suggest that benevolent leaders successfully retain the employees and boost their commitment by virtue of showing holistic care towards to employees. Those employees who have been working for 7 to 10 years in hotel industry also got the highest mean values for both organisational commitment's components of affective commitment (3.58) and normative commitment (3.43); and the lowest mean value for continuance commitment (2.90). These results have proven that these employees are staying in the current position for a long duration due to their sense of affection and responsibility towards their career but not lacking other job alternatives.

**Table 2** Profile of Variables

Construct	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variance
<b>Benevolent Leadership</b>	3.67	.656	.431
<b>Organisational Commitment</b>	3.28	.353	.125

Apart from that, the hotel employees from human resource department rated a highest mean score for benevolent leadership (4.02) and organisational commitment (3.39). It entails that human resource department of hotel industry has more benevolent leaders than other departments and their employees are highly commitment to the

organisation. The group of employees from security department shares the highest mean values of organisational commitment as human resource department as well. However, sales and marketing department has low mean values for all variables and components which are: 1) benevolent leadership = 3.43; 2) organisational commitment = 3.10; 3) affective commitment = 3.00; 4) continuance commitment = 3.17; 5) normative commitment = 3.13. It shows that the lesser the leaders practice the benevolent behaviours, the lower the organisational commitment of the employees.

In addition, it is noticed that the respondents aged between 41 and 50 have the highest mean rating for all constructs among other age groups. It has high scores of 4.00 for benevolent leadership and 3.43 for organisational commitment. It marks another evidence for supporting the proposed hypothesis of this study. It is also observed that the older the respondents' age group, the higher the mean values for normative commitment. It might refer that elders are more responsible workers than the youngsters. Male employees have higher normative commitment than female employees as well. This result hints that male workers have a higher sense of obligation towards their company.

Overall, the assistant manager's group of respondents obtained the highest mean value for both benevolent leadership and organisational commitment, which are 4.38 and 3.9 respectively. The supervisor level of respondents has relatively high mean scores for the two variables as well, which are 3.85 and 3.56 respectively. It signifies more benevolent leaders are from higher management levels.

#### ***4.3 Reliability and Validity***

The internal consistency and effectiveness of the measuring instruments in reflecting the relevance of construct were scrutinized by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) before carrying out the structural model. To attain the above-mentioned purpose, the assessment of unidimensionality, validity and reliability of the constructs must be satisfied. The fitness indices of a model which are under the fitness category of absolute fit, incremental fit and parsimonious fit are the indicators to measure the unidimensionality, validity and reliability of the constructs (Awang, 2012). The requirement of these fitness indices are as follow: 1) Root Mean Square of Error Approximation (RMSEA) < 0.08 (Browne and Cudeck, 1993); 2) Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) > 0.90 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1984); 3) Comparative Fit Index (CFI) > 0.90 (Bentler, 1990); and 4) Chi-Square/Degrees of Freedom (Chisq/df) < 5.0 (Marsh and Hocevar, 1985).

Unidimensionality is accomplished via the repetition of the process of model respecification, which connotes the deletion of redundant items and items with low factor loadings until the required fitness indices were perfected. Construct validity is satisfied as a result of there is at least one of the fitness indices under each fitness category was fulfilled with the required values. Convergent validity is obtained in that most of the values of average variance extracted (AVE) of the constructs are more than .50. Lastly, the reliability of the model based on the results of Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR) and AVE indicates an acceptable internal consistency for the constructs. The Cronbach's alpha values for benevolent leadership and organisational are 0.90, 0.80 and 0.93 respectively. The values of composite reliability (CR) for all constructs and sub-constructs have achieved the required minimum value of .60 (Awang,

2012). Lastly, most of the values of AVE in overall are near to the agreeable level of .50 (Awang, 2012). The results of CFA are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3** *The CFA Results for the Measurement Model*

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR <sup>3</sup>	AVE <sup>4</sup>			
BL <sup>1</sup>	BL1	0.73	0.902	0.903	0.540			
	BL3	0.80						
	BL4	0.82						
	BL5	0.71						
	BL6	0.74						
	BL7	0.74						
	BL9	0.70						
	BL10	0.62						
	OC <sup>2</sup>					0.821	0.893	0.417
	Affective Commitment	OC1				0.73	0.791	0.795
OC2		0.67						
OC3		0.78						
OC4		0.62						
Continuance Commitment	OC9	0.57	0.714	0.726	0.357			
	OC11	0.39						
	OC12	0.77						
	OC14	0.65						
Normative Commitment	OC16	0.54	0.664	0.673	0.416			
	OC17	0.73						
	OC19	0.71						
	OC20	0.46						

<sup>1</sup>BL indicates benevolent leadership

<sup>2</sup>OC indicates organisational commitment

<sup>3</sup>CR =  $(\sum K)^2 / [(\sum K)^2 + \sum (1 - K^2)]$

<sup>4</sup>AVE =  $\sum K^2/n$ ; K = Factor loading of every item; n = number of items in a model

#### 4.4 Structural Model Results and Hypothesis Testing

The statistical analysis was continued with structural equation modeling (SEM) in testing the hypothesis proposed in this study. The structural model of benevolent leadership and organisational commitment was illustrated by using AMOS. Table 4 indicates that at least one of the fitness indices under each category of fitness has achieved the satisfying level. The results in Table 5 reveal that benevolent leadership is positively and significantly related to organisational commitment (Estimate = .53,  $p < .01$ ). The hypothesis of this study is therefore supported.

**Table 4** *The Assessment of Fitness of the Structural Model of Benevolent Leadership and Organisational Commitment*

Name of Category	Name of Index	Index Value	Comment
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1. Absolute Fit	<b>RMSEA</b>	<b>.070</b>	<b>The required level is achieved</b>
	GFI	.843	The required level is not achieved
2. Incremental Fit	<b>CFI</b>	<b>.901</b>	<b>The required level is achieved</b>
3. Parsimonious Fit	<b>Chisq/df</b>	<b>1.786</b>	<b>The required level is achieved</b>

**Table 5** *The Standardised Regression Weights and its Significance for the Path between Benevolent Leadership and Organisational Commitment*

Hypothesis	Construct	Path	Construct	Estimate	P-value	Result
1	OC <sup>2</sup>	←	BL <sup>1</sup>	.532	.000	Supported

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study has proven the significant positive relationship between benevolent leadership and organisational commitment. The descriptive analysis of demographic variables has confirmed further the positive effect of benevolent leadership towards organisational commitment. The hypothesis proposed was supported.

There were limited studies which looked into the relationship between benevolent leadership and organisational commitment. Scholars have inspected the above-mentioned relationship either by considering benevolent leadership as a component of paternalistic leadership or not taking all three components of organisational commitment into account. This study examined the relationship of benevolent leadership as an independent construct with the entire construct of organisational commitment.

This study proposed the expediency of applying benevolent leadership in a multicultural context notwithstanding benevolent leadership was mostly studied in the Chinese context. The generalisation and practicality of benevolent leadership theory have been broadened since the potential positive outcomes of benevolent leading behaviours were discovered beyond the Chinese context. As Malaysia is a multicultural country, the findings of this study may become a reference for other Southeast Asia countries which have only one ethnic group as the majority population.

This study imparts solutions for the turnover issues of the hotel industry in Malaysia by proving the eminence of benevolent leadership. The results encourage the recruitment of benevolent talents and cultivation of benevolent leadership behaviours from existing workforce. Potent strategies can be developed; training programs can be upgraded; and personnel allocation can be implemented to ease the turnover issues. Tourists distinguished Malaysia as one of their favourable long-haul destination (Salman & Hasim, 2012). The inconstancy of the labour pool in the hotel industry could be hindering to the development of tourism industry. The stability of human resources can otherwise provide the conditions for the booming and flourishing of the tourism industry of Malaysia.

The voyage of exploring benevolent leadership theory has just begun to sail. A vast number of potential antecedents that predict benevolent leadership in terms of leaders' personality factors or situational variables can be discovered in future studies, for instances, leaders' self-sacrifice, job satisfaction and organisational trust. In addition,

the mediators and moderators between benevolent leadership and organisational commitment can be suggested.

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